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HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE



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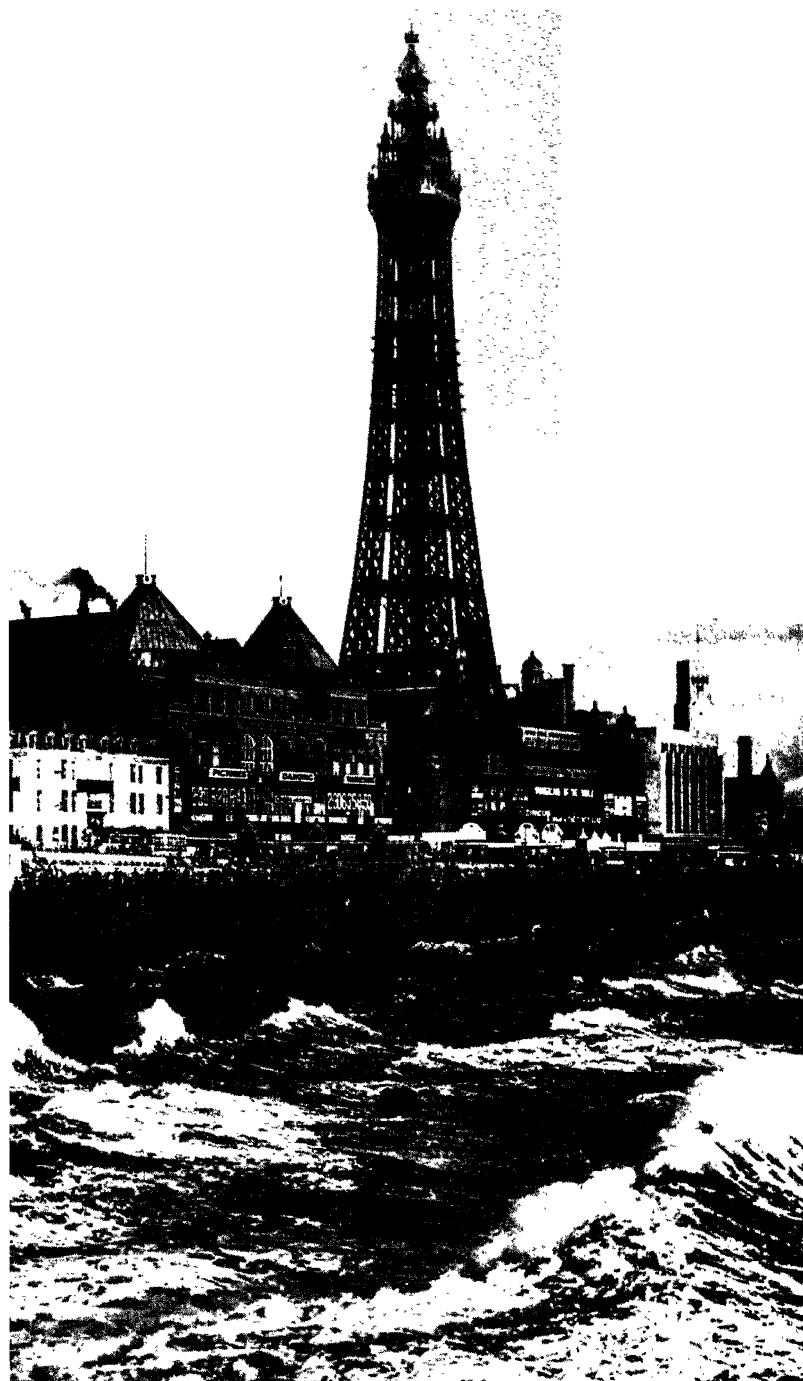
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HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

SYDNEY MOORHOUSE

F.R.G.S., F.Z.S.

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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TO HILDA, PAT AND MICHAEL,
the three with whom I share a life in
HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>page</i>
I SOUTH OF THE RIBBLE	I
II THE FYLDE	33
III BLACKPOOL AND FLEETWOOD	55
IV BETWEEN WYRE AND LUNE	81
V LANCASTER	104
VI MORECAMBE AND MORECAMBE BAY	137
VII MORECAMBE AND MORECAMBE BAY— <i>Continued</i>	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY	213
INDEX	219

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	Blackpool Tower, the symbol of Holiday Lancashire	<i>frontispiece</i>
2	At the sunset hour. Southport's Marine Lake	<i>facing page</i> 16
3	Rock gardens at Southport Flower Show, the North's greatest floral exhibition	17
4	Lytham, where an ancient windmill still dominates the coastal green	32
5	Leafy Lytham. A woodland glade within a short distance of the sea	33
6	Blackpool sands. A Lancashire holiday crowd enjoying itself <i>en masse</i>	48
7	Illuminations at Blackpool. The autumn carnival of light	49
8	In the peaceful Fylde. A country lane not very far from Blackpool	64
9	A Fylde road. On the doorstep of Blackpool is peaceful agricultural country	65
10	With the peat cutters. Harvesting the mosses at Pilling	80
11	Glasson Dock, part of the old Port of Lancaster	81
12	Where the horse still receives support. A scene on Morecambe promenade	96
13	A yarn about tides and fish. Morecambe's fishermen	97
14	Sunset across Morecambe Bay. Morecambe's nobbies in the foreground	112
15	Hay-making at Heysham. Farm workers on the edge of Morecambe Bay	113

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>facing page</i>
16 At Sunderland Point. The well-known cotton tree	128
17 Off to the cockling beds. Going to the sea with horse and cart	129
18 Following the sands. A woman shellfish gatherer in Morecambe Bay	144
19 Start of the Cross-Bay Swim. Competitors swim from Grange over Sands to Morecambe	145
20 On the saltings. Wildfowling has many devotees around Morecambe Bay	160
21 Link with the United States. Warton has intimate connections with the Washington family	161
22 In rural Lancashire. A scene at Yealand Redmayne not far from the A6 trunk road	176
23 Fell foxhunting. The Coniston pack meets in Cartmel square	177
24 Hound trailing. One of the most popular sports in North Lancashire	192
25 The entrance to Lakeland. The Leven estuary leading towards the foot of Windermere	193
Sketch Map of area	<i>follows page 215</i>

Present-day difficulties do not permit of a comprehensive map of the area being included in this book. For more detailed information readers are referred to the respective Ordnance Survey sheets.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

All the above illustrations are reproduced from photographs supplied by J. Hardman, Esq., Kendal.

FOREWORD

"I GO into Lancashire tomorrow, that part of the country lying beyond the mountains towards the western coast. I go with a kind of dread, and trust in divine providence."

So wrote Camden, the chronicler of the days of the first Queen Elizabeth. Today, nearly four hundred years afterwards, folk still think overnight of the journey into western Lancashire. If there is any dread, it is of having forgotten something during the packing of trunks. For the rest, it is purely pleasurable anticipation. To thousands of people every summer, a journey into Lancashire means a journey to the coast—to Holiday Lancashire.

Not only have those four centuries witnessed a completely changed outlook towards the journey, but, more important, they have resulted in an entirely changed coastline. What in Camden's day was no more than a succession of sand dunes and salt marsh, interspersed with little communities of fisherfolk and manor-houses, stretching north along the Lancashire coast from the mouth of the little river Alt to the north tip of Morecambe Bay, is now the most popular holiday coast in northern England. The main changes have come within the last two hundred years. Southport, Blackpool, Fleetwood, Morecambe, as well as a number of smaller resorts, are the result of a growth that has been phenomenal, yet so firmly are they established today that it seems difficult to imagine a Lancashire without them.

Holiday Lancashire, as one might conveniently term this coastline, is topographically divided into sections between the various estuaries that open out into the Irish Sea. Between the somewhat insignificant Alt and the much greater Ribble, Southport holds sway. Blackpool and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Fleetwood dominate the holiday traffic between the Ribble and the Wyre. North, between the Wyre and the Lune, the holiday coast recedes, and we have a stretch of Lancashire seaboard subject to far less sweeping changes than the rest. Beyond the Lune we have Morecambe on the south side of the bay which gives it its name, and then farther north, in the detached peninsulas of Cartmel and Furness and where a coastal strip of Westmorland bisects the county,

FOREWORD

is a Lancashire which differs vastly from the remainder of the county. Here, indeed, Lancashire merges into the Lake District, and the influence of the mountains and fells makes its presence felt throughout.

The Lancashire coast, dominated as it is by the holiday towns of recent growth, is something much more than an area of seaside resorts. Within a few miles of the big towns are villages peopled by country folk whose ancestral roots delve deep into all that is expressed by the words tradition and convention. Naturally, recent development has had its repercussions on their own ways of life. They are dovetailed into the fabric of the whole—fishermen, farmers, and the like. And they have their part, too, in the story of Holiday Lancashire.

So, too, has the city of Lancaster itself, with its proud castle and historic church standing high on the hill overlooking the estuary of the Lune. Lancaster, with its intimate connexions with reigning monarchs, naturally figured largely in the greater happenings of history, and because of that its influence on the neighbouring countryside was great. Disputes regarding religious practices, quarrels and strife concerning the disposition of the Throne itself had their partisans among the squires and gentry of the Lancashire seaboard. The humbler folk of cottage and farmstead were drawn into the affairs with which they had little real concern. Lancaster has lost much of its past importance. Even the county administration offices are now situated elsewhere. But so long as castle and ancient church still retain their attractions, the city will retain its place in Holiday Lancashire.

For me, however, the Lancashire coast is much more than a holiday coast. For many years I have lived there, mingled with its farmfolk and fishermen, hunted with its packs of fell foxhounds and beagles, enjoyed its entertainments along with its visitors in summer and residents in winter. Its many and varied aspects are, indeed, part and parcel of my own life.

To mention all who have helped me in so many ways in the things that went towards the making of this book is impossible, but I would give special thanks to the various librarians, in particular Mr Gilbert M. Bland of Lancaster, who have given me access to out-of-print books and records in their possession. Where I have drawn upon the works of others, past and present writers, I have, whenever possible, made reference in the text. I am

FOREWORD

also indebted to my friend and colleague, Mr J. Hardman, of Kendal, for placing such a varied selection of photographs from his magnificent collection at my disposal for the purposes of illustration; to the British Broadcasting Corporation; to the Editors of *Country Fair*, *Farmer and Stockbreeder*, *Field*, *Lancashire Life*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Sport and Country*, under whose auspices some of the material in the pages that follow first appeared; and to my wife, without whose help in so many ways this book could never have been written.

SYDNEY MOORHOUSE

CHAPTER I

SOUTH OF THE RIBBLE

I

SOUTH of the Ribble, which moves serene and deep through a vast stretch of sand, Holiday Lancashire is mainly centred on Southport, a coastal resort which, like its rivals of Blackpool and Morecambe, is chiefly a product of the last century.

Indeed, the name Southport goes no farther back into history than the last decade of the eighteenth century. Prior to that, the ancient parish of North Meols extended over the flat lands bordering the sea, and the name Meols itself is derived from the old Scandinavian "Melr", meaning a sandhill or sandbank.

A thousand years after, the old term would remain quite apt. Indeed, from the Ribble to the Alt, today a comparatively unimportant river which enters the Irish Sea south of Formby Point, might be regarded as the sandiest section of the Lancashire coastline. Southport's retreating tides, while presenting problems enough to those who fear that the loss of a sea front may leave the local authorities with but a dubious claim to having a "seaside" resort in their charge, have left behind one of the biggest stretches of sand possessed by any coastal town. North of the town, where sand and mud seem to be fighting hard for supremacy, the local fisherfolk reach their shrimping grounds by horse-and-cart rather than by the more orthodox boats; and south, an ever-increasing accumulation of sandhills has called for special attention from forestry experts and others who have applied various methods of arresting the activities of those natural agencies which could change the topography of a coastline almost overnight. And at Formby, at the southern end of the Lancashire holiday coast, the local folk use this sand for the growing of asparagus.

Southport is, indeed, built on sand, but, as though in contradiction of the parable, it has an air of permanence and durability. Its wide, sunny streets help to sustain that air, but go down to its promenade, beyond which the waters of an artificial lake lap in more subdued key than the untamed waves of the sea, and look

out to where the sea should be. Perhaps you notice it away beyond a stretch of sand, aloof and not quite sure of its proper place in the scheme of things, but more often than not you will look across the wide sands to the gleaming thread of the Ribble and, farther away, the green coastline of the Fylde country and the needle of Blackpool's Tower.

It is, of course, mainly as the result of the early planners of Southport itself that we get the air of permanency, but behind it is just sufficient history to link a modern town with the past. And that history is connected with the older parish of North Meols.

According to Prior Wessington, the monks in charge of the bones of St Cuthbert rested at a place called Meler, between Lytham and Halsall in West Lancashire, during the seven years of wanderings that followed the destruction of Lindisfarne Priory, off the Northumberland coast, by the Danes in 867, until a permanent resting place was obtained at Durham. As it was the custom to establish a church wherever the Saint's bones rested, it is more than likely that here we have the origin of the Church of North Meols.

Following the Norman Conquest, Mele, and later, Moles, is recorded as among the possessions of the Bussels, Barons of Penwortham, on the south bank of the Ribble and opposite the town of Preston, with the tithes granted to the Abbot of Evesham; but in 1537, two years before the larger monasteries were dissolved, a rector was "presented" to North Meols, and, following the Dissolution, North Meols became an independent parish of 10,683 acres in extent.

Undoubtedly one of the most interesting of its earlier rectors was the Rev. Thomas Stanley, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who was instituted in 1556. He was the son of the first Lord Montague, of Hornby Castle, near Lancaster, the famous Stanley of the encounter on Flodden Field, and had become Bishop of Sodor fourteen years before being connected with North Meols. His original holding of that office lasted for only three years, and then, having refused to comply with an Act of Henry VIII by which his diocese was transferred from Canterbury to York, he found himself dismissed.

Peace, however, was restored, and Bishop Stanley returned to his post in 1556. In the meantime, his refusal to agree to the change had not prevented him from "collecting" a number of other

livings, all, strangely enough, in the province of York. He secured those at Wigan and Winwick in Lancashire and Badsworth in Yorkshire—three of the richest in the whole country—as well as North Meols. Yet the cares of office seem, on the whole, to have rested lightly on his shoulders. A letter from the Bishop of Durham to the Archbishop of York contains the illuminating disclosure that “the Bishop of Man liveth here at his ease, as merry as Pope John”. Stanley died in 1568.

North Meols, indeed, seems to have had rectors of purpose, if not always of the most devout intentions. In 1640, King Charles I was responsible for appointing one James Starkie to the joint offices of rector of North Meols and vicar of Preston. Then came the Civil Wars, the defeat of the King, and the establishment of the Commonwealth—a disastrous time for many church dignitaries. Starkie, however, was not one to let a mere change of constitution upset him. He was as careful a supporter of Cromwell as he had been of the King, and never once was in danger of losing his appointments. Even the restoration of the monarchy he took in his stride. He willingly subscribed to the Act of Uniformity passed in the reign of Charles II, and held office to his death. Men still sing of the “Vicar of Bray”, but the activities of the rector of North Meols have been forgotten.

History, however, brings no stories of wars or skirmishes of major importance. The activities of its rectors and local squires affected little outside the immediate environs of North Meols. Much more important have been the effects of the changing activities of the sea, and even these produced nothing in the way of startling calamity by sudden inroads or mighty storms. Yet the effect was such that local cartography can never have been constant for more than a century at a time, and even villages have been covered by the tide and then left buried under a great accumulation of sand as the tide changed its mind and no longer hugged the coastline.

We hear a deal of talk about Southport’s “retreating tide”, but seventeenth-century records show that things were pretty much the same as they are today. Since then the sea has been in and gone out again! In fact, an account of the year 1612 tells of the Horsebank, a great sandbank at the entrance to the Ribble Estuary, being used for the pasturage of cattle; but sixty years before then—in 1552—a witness at a trial concerning shore rights quoted his

father as having recalled that two miles of "fair pasture had been worn into by the sea" in the first half of the fifteenth century.

In fact, the story of erosion and accretion hereabouts seems to be one of continuity, and I should not wonder if some local expert has worked out the cycles and brought hope to the councillors of Southport by stating the time when the sea will again wash the edge of the promenade!

In 1809, according to Mr William Ashton's *Evolution of a Coast Line*, published early in the present century, the Horsebank was split into eight small islands visible at low tide. Then Southport was a developing fishing port, with the number of trawl boats increasing from thirteen to over a hundred before the 1850s. Meanwhile, the holiday trade was being developed, the trade which was to continue long after the sea had withdrawn again and the fishing trawls become but a memory.

The closing years of the eighteenth century saw a minor revolution taking place in the habits of Englishmen. Perhaps not so often quoted as the greater changes that were happening at the same time in industrial development and in the practice of husbandry, the sudden realisation of the delights of sea-bathing was the forerunner of the modern habit of spending holidays by the sea, which has developed an industry of its own.

Lancashire folk have never been slow to profit by innovations, and when the people from the interior began to come to North Meols and the surrounding coastal hamlets, many of the locals provided carts to take them to a natural bathing pool by the mouth of a small stream near present-day Birkdale and close to an obscure collection of cottages then known as South Hawes. Commenting on these changes, a contemporary writer said of North Meols: "The beach is plain, open, and level, and at this time is much used for sea-bathing, though in Elizabeth's reign there was scarcely a house to be seen, unless we should dignify by that appellation a few straggling cabins that had been thrown up by fishermen who frequented the coast of North Meols during the fishing season, and which were formerly loose logs of wood patched over with turf and thatched with rushes that grew in the neighbourhood. The coast as it retires inland consists of a chain of barren sandhills, which are holden together by the sea mat-weed, and were probably then used as a rabbit warren."

As always, there was the one enterprising man who went a step

further than his fellows. This was a Churchtown innkeeper named William Sutton, who, in 1792, built a wooden shanty by the mouth of a small stream near the Birkdale boundary, and proceeded to provide refreshments for the bathers. The hut was made from scraps of timber he had salvaged from the shore, and must, indeed, have been the very kind of erection that the zealous planning authorities would today condemn out of hand and banish from the shore.

At first Sutton's shack was only open during the height of summer. His enterprise, however, was rewarded; so much so that after six years the wooden shanty came down and a more permanent building took its place. Sutton took out a licence, and left his Churchtown inn to devote himself whole-heartedly to his new establishment.

Needless to say, his neighbours were not impressed. They dubbed the new building "The Folly"; they gave its owner the title of "The Duke". Yet, folly or no, it was here—if local tradition can be relied on—that modern Southport was born, and we have it in Mr. E. Bland's *Annals of Southport*, published in 1903, that in the autumn of 1798:

"House-warming was arranged for the Thursday night after the return from Ormskirk market. At the old market town the news that day arrived of Nelson's victory of the Nile. The house-warming ceremony was consequently made to do double duty. Dr Barton, a retired Ormskirk surgeon, presided over the event, and facetiously named the place the South Port hotel, by dashing about him a bottle of wine in the manner of christening a ship. The term 'port' had reference to a former bay, of eleven fathoms, which existed at the mouth of the adjoining stream. The hotel having been baptised, the company adjourned to the banks of the stream, which, in honour of Nelson's triumph, was designated 'the Nile'; hence the various appellations in the neighbourhood. The district rapidly became known as Southport instead of South Hawes."

Such a story may seem almost facetious and certainly inconsequential, yet Lancashire folk have a habit of sorting these things out for themselves, and in 1892—one hundred years after that shanty had made its appearance on the local shore—the Centenary of Southport was celebrated with due pomp and reverence. In the

wall of the gardens on the south side of Lord Street is a tablet removed from a monument—which originally took the practical form of a street-lamp—erected to Sutton's memory in 1860. This reads:

"This column was erected A.D. 1860 by the Improvement Committee as a tribute of respect to the late William Sutton, commonly known as the 'Old Duke', the founder of Southport. He was born at Churchtown, North Meols, A.D. 1752, and died there May 22, 1840. He erected almost on this spot A.D. 1792, the first house in what is now the flourishing town of Southport, then a wilderness of sandhills. The house, originally called the 'Duke's Folly', was afterwards known as the Original Hotel, a memorial tablet taken from its walls has been placed on the N.E. side of this column, and this street has received the name of Duke Street in remembrance of the 'Old Duke'."

The lamp was originally placed at the corner of Duke Street and Lord Street, and the tablet was moved to its present position some years ago. The other tablet referred to can also be seen, and bears the inscription:

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, 1792.

"This house was built in memory of D. W. Sutton, of North Meols, who was the First Founder and Executor of Southport, which was called his folly for many years; and it proved that his foresight was his wisdom, which should be remembered with gratitude by the Lords of this Manor and the inhabitants of this place also."

The "Old Duke's" foresight, however, does not seem to have greatly benefited him, however many benefits it conferred upon others, for eleven years after building his house he was in financial difficulties and let the hotel for a term of twenty-one years while he repaired to the debtors' prison in Lancaster Castle!

The story of Sutton's shanty and subsequent hotel is, of course, quite a highlight in that of Southport, but in 1797, five years after the "folly" had been built, something else occurred which, while nothing like so dramatic or entertaining, had an equal effect on the subsequent development of the resort. In that year, one of the two lords of the manor, Bold Fleetwood Hesketh, became High

Sheriff of the County Palatine of Lancaster. The chief residence of the family was at Rossall, on the coast between Fleetwood and Blackpool (neither of which were anything like the places we know today), but Rossall being somewhat off the beaten track, the family moved for the term of office to the secondary seat at Meols Hall. There, the entertaining that fell to the lot of a High Sheriff took place. And as the result, many influential families found themselves attracted to the vicinity of the place, and they purchased plots of land near the coast.

Thus, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, we see the beginnings of Southport as both a holiday resort and a residential area.

The next two decades were vital ones in the story of Southport. Here was a seaside resort already showing signs of development, and at hand, too, were the growing towns and cities containing the very folk who could, if encouraged, bring prosperity to the holiday place in embryo. North of the Ribble, too, Blackpool was going through its teething stages, and doubtless there were other places along the Lancashire coast that were casting covetous eyes in the direction of the industrial centres that were likely to mould their entire future.

At the same time there were obvious signs that Southport had also a future as a residential place. How easy it would have been to have failed to strike a balance between the two, and, possibly, attracted neither holiday makers nor residents in the end.

This, indeed, seems to have been the era that determined the future pattern of the Lancashire seaside resorts. From the very first Blackpool set out to cater for the multitudes, and ever since has remained steadfast to the original idea. On the other hand, Southport's approach was more reserved. Let the crowds come along by all means, but at the same time let us safeguard against turning away the quieter type of visitor whose patronage will, in the long run, be more worth-while. If that was the motto it was a good one—and it has paid ample dividend.

In 1825 the two lords of the manor, Peter Hesketh, who was later instrumental for the development of Fleetwood higher up the coast, and Henry Bold-Hoghton, sent their representatives along to discuss certain exchanges of land with a view to facilitating expansion. A private Act of Parliament sanctioned the exchanges, and, as the result, something in the way of town planning

HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

was put into operation at this early stage, and the development of Southport into a garden-city type of holiday resort ensured.

What was it about that early town planning that made its mark so indelibly on Southport and laid down a pattern that has never been broken? Simply the inclusion in the various building leases of covenants whereby any houses built had to be either detached or semi-detached and to have gardens both back and front. As the result, it would be difficult to find a place of its size with fewer back streets in the centre of the town.

In the suburbs it is different. It was bound to be. Suburbia in Southport, as elsewhere, is something of a comparatively recent growth, a reflection of an age when houses were put up quickly and men temporarily forgot the existence of beauty. It is easy for us to condemn today, but the prevailing temper of one decade is neither that of the next nor of the one before. Fortunately, few visitors to Southport are concerned with its suburbia. Why should they be when there is so much of beauty, even of man-made beauty, so readily at hand?

It is almost impossible to over-exaggerate the importance of that pioneer planning scheme. Even today, when competition between the Lancashire holiday towns has grown keen, and municipal authorities are taxing their wits to think of new schemes to attract patronage, there is no real clash between Southport and its rival north of the Ribble, Blackpool. Each has its distinct clientele. The confirmed Southport enthusiast would find Blackpool's easy conviviality somewhat superficial; the regular Blackpool visitor would mistake Southport's reserve for aloofness and perhaps false snobbery. It is as well that the ways diverged over a hundred years ago. Holiday Lancashire, south of Morecambe Bay at any rate, does not stretch over many miles, and fierce competition might have meant neither Blackpool nor Southport as we know them today.

What Southport might have feared was competition from Morecambe farther north, for had Morecambe followed the line of Southport it might have had adverse effects on the resort south of the Ribble. Southport is built on sand, and has little beauty of natural setting; Morecambe, on the other hand, commands one of the finest panoramas in the whole country from its promenade, a view across a wide bay to the green hills of Furness and the Lakeland mountains behind. Yet Morecambe somehow contrived

to forget its natural advantages and followed Blackpool's lead, and has never looked like reducing the leeway.

The same two lords of the manor are commemorated in the name of Southport's greatest pride, Lord Street, which was originally Lords Street—a magnificent mile-long, wide, sunny, tree-bespangled street. On one side of it are the shops. I am no connoisseur of ladies' wear, or of the other things that appeal mainly to the fair sex. But I do know that during the height of summer even the forty-feet wide pavement seems incapable of accommodating all those who seem anxious to gaze into Lord Street's shop windows. Mere man may seem almost out of place here, but he does know that Lord Street's shops will provide his wife with many a morning's pleasure, expensive or inexpensive according to her purse. Perhaps he himself is wiser to stay away!

Cross the street, however, and shopping is forgotten. Municipal buildings, the General Post Office, cinemas, and the like have their place here. And in front of them are gardens, colourful with floral blooms from spring to late autumn, and with bands playing throughout the season. Even the residents of Southport must feel a pride in going to pay their rates when they have to pass between rows of flowers and hear the strains of music!

Lord Street is attractive in the day time; at night it seems to scintillate with all the fairy attractiveness of hundreds of coloured lights strung from tree to tree and from building to building. The stone to Sutton's memory then lies forgotten in the shadows—and, truth to tell, even Sutton himself is little remembered by either visitor or resident. Yet he it was who started it all.

What Sutton began in so inauspicious and, possibly, undignified a way, Hesketh and Bold-Hoghton endorsed with dignity. Lord Street was really their creation, and it is a pity that the old name of Lords' Street was not retained to perpetuate the connexion.

Yet, to be completely frank, Lord Street was not entirely the result of their good planning alone. Geology played a not inconsiderable part. We should not be very far off the mark if we said that Lord Street was really born in those far-off days when, the rigours of the Ice Age having already passed into old history, much of West Lancashire, and for that matter of the Irish Sea as well, was covered with dense forest. The retreating of the glaciers, however, had left its aftermath in a series of hollows, lined with boulder clay and filled with water. These shrank, and left bogland

behind. Then the bogs began to expand and the trees and vegetation began to go under, forming those thick layers of peat which are so commonly found about the coastline of West Lancashire today.

Indeed, there are places all about the coast between the Ribble and the Alt where we find the remains of this thick layer of peat just underneath the sand, and when the sand has formed into dunes, there are miniature lakes, or "slacks" (to use the local term) between them, just as there were in the days of yore. In the immediate vicinity of Southport itself the slacks have, of course, disappeared, but go down the coast to Ainsdale and Freshfield and you find them in plenty. They have produced a botanical paradise unparalleled elsewhere in the north-west. But of this more in due course.

When Southport was coming into existence—indeed, at the very time the meeting of representatives of the manorial lords took place—one of these slacks extended the length of what is now Lord Street, and because of its presence the first buildings were erected on the drier sandhills on either side. Now, of course, the water has disappeared and the gardens and trees have taken its place, but the newer buildings have been placed on the older sites. What must have been a very inconvenient early feature has contributed largely to the beauty of the modern Lord Street.

We have a pleasing picture of the old Lord Street in the *History of Southport*, published and, presumably, written by William Alsop, the first printer in the town, in 1832. He wrote:

"Southport, at first glance, is calculated to fill the mind with admiration, especially the minds of those who delight in rural retreats from the noise and turmoil of a bustling town. It consists of one principal street, nearly a mile in length, and upwards of ninety yards in width, composed of handsome houses on each side, adorned with gardens in front, most tastefully laid out. When viewed from a distance it appears to be a long line of uniformly arranged buildings, with scarcely one house projecting beyond another, but upon a nearer approach thereto, each cottage or at least each group of cottages, exhibits its own peculiar character, and presents an agreeable variety, which, from the extreme length of prospect, is lost or unobserved in the distance. With respect to the buildings the visitor must be

devoid of sensitive feelings that cannot admire the variety here presented to his view. Not only will the display of architecture attract attention, but also the gardens with a rich assortment of flowers, that occasionally shed forth their odiferous scents."

Of the people of his time Alsop is even more encouraging, and tells us:

"The general character and manners of the stated inhabitants of Southport, as they assume no characteristic sufficient to distinguish them from those of similar places, will not long detain the visitor. The reader will not often be disgusted with the petty assumptions of those who are invested with a 'little brief authority' nor will he be displeased in perceiving in a large majority of the people, a considerable portion of civility, hospitality, social intercourse, and liberality of opinion; and if great refinement of manners do not characterise them in the aggregate, the stranger will have employed his leisure to little advantage who does not soon discover in the village a very extensive share of that frankness, benevolence, and warmth, which is a prominent feature of the old English character. Numbers in different ranks of society are here to be met with whose lives are adorned with bright examples of integrity and true virtue."

Later, Mr Alsop becomes rather more critical of his contemporaries when he says:

"Respecting the literary character of Southport, little indeed can be said; the few libraries of a circulating name that exist here are of such a description as not to warrant the highest encomiums, and in fact, they are the infallible criteria whereby the true state of society is properly judged. If some of the inhabitants or visitors are brought to this test—if they are scrutinized by this mode—if they are weighed accurately in this balance—they will, most assuredly, be found wanting. Here a good public library is much to be desired, to consist of the most useful, instructive, and entertaining works extant; and this is not solely for those who move in the more exalted walks of life, but accessible to all, at a moderate charge of hire for a single or complete set of books. Many there are who will

readily deprecate this idea, and not even allow such an association with those who make any high pretensions to the literature of the age. Where this spirit is found, there will also be found a weak and contracted mind; one whose sphere of usefulness is indeed limited and whose good intentions are 'lighter than the wind'."

Needless to say, Alsop's fears have long since been removed, and Southport's library service can take its place in a county whose library services throughout leave very little to be desired.

I have, of course, stressed already that Southport is built on sand, and, naturally, our literary mentor has something to say of the sands.

"The salubrity of Southport [he informs us] arises in some degree from the absence of any substratum of marl or clay, but being all sand to an indefinite extent, it receives the rain almost as speedily as it descends from the heavens; hence, parties may walk out clean and dry immediately after the heaviest shower. But even this sand, which is of such infinite benefit to the salubrity of the place, has its inconveniences also. Being of such an extremely fine sort, it becomes easily drifted by the wind, and, consequently a source of some little annoyance to those who may never have been accustomed to anything of the kind; but, as with other matters, custom soon becomes akin to nature, and the inconvenience is not so much experienced after a few weeks' residence in this land of sand. The ladies, however, do well to wear veils here the year around, not so much as to hide their external charms, as a preservative for the eyes; green ones, in the heat of summer, would be recommended in preference to others, owing to the powerful reflection of the sun upon the sand."

Finally, I would quote this exquisite passage:

"For bathing, the shore at Southport is, undoubtedly, the finest in the kingdom; being of a gradual descent for more than a mile before we reach low water, and is free from shoals or quicksands. Bathing machines, in goodly order and number, are here employed. They are upon a new construction, being mounted on four wheels. On this plan, the danger of turning the machine in the water is thus removed—being made to

return to the shore without turning. The owners of the machines are remarkably attentive and obliging, each striving to excel in arrangement for those who are desirous of bathing.

"To maintain order and decorum on the shore, the following Rules and Regulations will be observed painted on a board:

"1st. There shall be a vacant space of one hundred yards between the bathing ground appointed for ladies, and that appointed for gentlemen; which ground shall be marked out by posts, with proper inscriptions upon them.

"2nd. Any owner of a machine going out of the line opposite the front and back posts, to be fined five shillings each time he goes beyond the bounds.

"3rd. Any pleasure boat, or other boat, coming within thirty yards of any machine, out of which any person or persons are bathing, the owner of such boat to be fined five shillings for every offence.

"4th. If any fisherman throws out of his boat any entrails of fish, or any dead fish, or leaves them on the shore without burying them in the sand, to be fined five shillings for every offence.

"5th. And any person or persons undressing on the beach, or on the hills, or crossing the shore naked, within one hundred yards from the two outside posts, will be dealt with as the law directs for the punishment of such offences."

Let us make our way to the promenade, wide and sunny as Lord Street itself, but, unlike the majority of promenades, receiving little of the tang of salt sea breezes. It was not always so. In fact, when the promenade was first commenced in 1835 it was built as a sea wall, to protect the town both from the encroachment of the sea and the discomforts of drifting sand. Since then the sea has been up to its pranks, withdrawing ever so slightly at first, but continuing until at length there was a vast expanse of sand between the promenade and the highest tide. Even so recently as at the beginning of the present century, ships bound for Preston docks up the Ribble channel could be seen swinging at anchor just off Southport pier, waiting for the return flow of the tide. At that time, too, Southport still supported quite a large fishing community, and their boats could often be seen in numbers in the "Bog Hole", just off the end of the pier.

That pier was, of course, a natural development. The original one was opened in 1860, and then, indeed, one really did walk over the sea. Piers throughout the country enjoyed a great boom in the second half of the last century, and that at Southport was extended eight years after it had been built. But Southport has never set out to attract the energetic. Perhaps there is something about the air that makes even the more strenuously inclined holiday maker inclined to relax. As the result, it was soon realised that walking to the end of a pier was an exercise that few would be willing to take. A tramway was accordingly constructed down the middle of the early erection, and the carriages were pushed by hand.

With the rebuilding, the carriage-way was moved to one side, and then in 1872 came a great innovation, when a cable and steam engine were substituted for the human means of locomotion. Now there is a unique electric railway, and, at the time of writing, schemes are on foot to substitute a modern miniature railway. And this in spite of the fact that a fire in 1933 burnt out much of the pier head, and the pier itself was shortened.

Time was, too, when a regular service of pleasure boats sailed from Southport pier during the holiday season, with trips to North Wales, the Isle of Man, Blackpool, and across the entrance to Morecambe Bay to Barrow-in-Furness as the most popular excursions. The First World War saw the vessels commandeered for other work, but even when that war had come to a close there was still sufficient depth of water to allow the trips to be recommenced. The withdrawal of the tide, however, continued, and gradually the channel silted up, so that it was during the summer of 1923 that the *Bickerstaffe*, perhaps the most loved of all the Lancashire coastal pleasure steamers, came to Southport pier for the last time.

Smaller boats and fishing vessels still continued to come in, but, soon after the 1933 fire, it was noticed that even the Bog Hole was getting shallower and sandier, and when that finally filled up, Southport's last link with seafaring snapped.

The retreating tide has, indeed, provided quite a headache for the Southport municipal authorities for some years, and it is almost a miracle that it has retained its claim to being a seaside resort. Yet, even so early as in the 1880s, a start was made to obscure that all-too-great expanse of sand by building a marine

lake between the promenade and the sea. This was partially opened in 1887, and five years afterwards had been extended to its present size.

No one could, of course, claim that a lake, even of such dimensions as that at Southport, could be a complete substitute for the sea, but there are scenes of animation throughout the summer months, when boats and yachts strive hard to give the town something of that maritime atmosphere which seems destined to remain in memory alone for a lifetime or more. If ever a British coastal resort succeeded in overcoming difficulties of situation and of natural agencies beyond human control, that resort is Southport.

In more recent years there has been a suggestion that more of the ever-expanding sands should be developed as gardens or other such ornamentations, but the civic authorities, rightly I think, have set themselves against further expansion of the seaward side. To have followed out these suggestions would, indeed, have been dangerous, for so long as nothing but sand separates the town from the sea it can claim to be a coastal resort. That claim is getting more and more slender—and as Lancashire and Yorkshire folk still turn to the sea when the holiday season comes along, Southport could ill afford to take risks.

One thing, however, the civic authorities have permitted themselves to do. For years there was a somewhat unsightly dump on the seaward side of the south section of the promenade, and in 1922 the old water 'chute that had run into the Marine Lake was moved and the nucleus of a pleasure park built on the derelict peninsula. Now there is a municipally controlled "fairground", with ghost trains, pleasure caves, and all the fun of the fair, bringing in a revenue of something like £24,000 a year in rents.

There are some who criticise this attempt at changing the atmosphere of the place—and certainly there is a noisy gaiety about the pleasure park which, until you get accustomed to it, seems somewhat alien to Southport. Indeed, I would have dearly liked to have been able to quote Mr Alsop's opinion of it. But we lived at a time when ladies and gentlemen bathed at some distances apart, when ladies wore veils to protect themselves—or their skins—from the sun, and when the lives of the good folk of Southport were "adorned with bright examples of integrity and true virtue". His age was certainly not that of pleasure beaches.

It seems difficult to recall that scarcely more than a century has passed since outlooks were so vastly different.

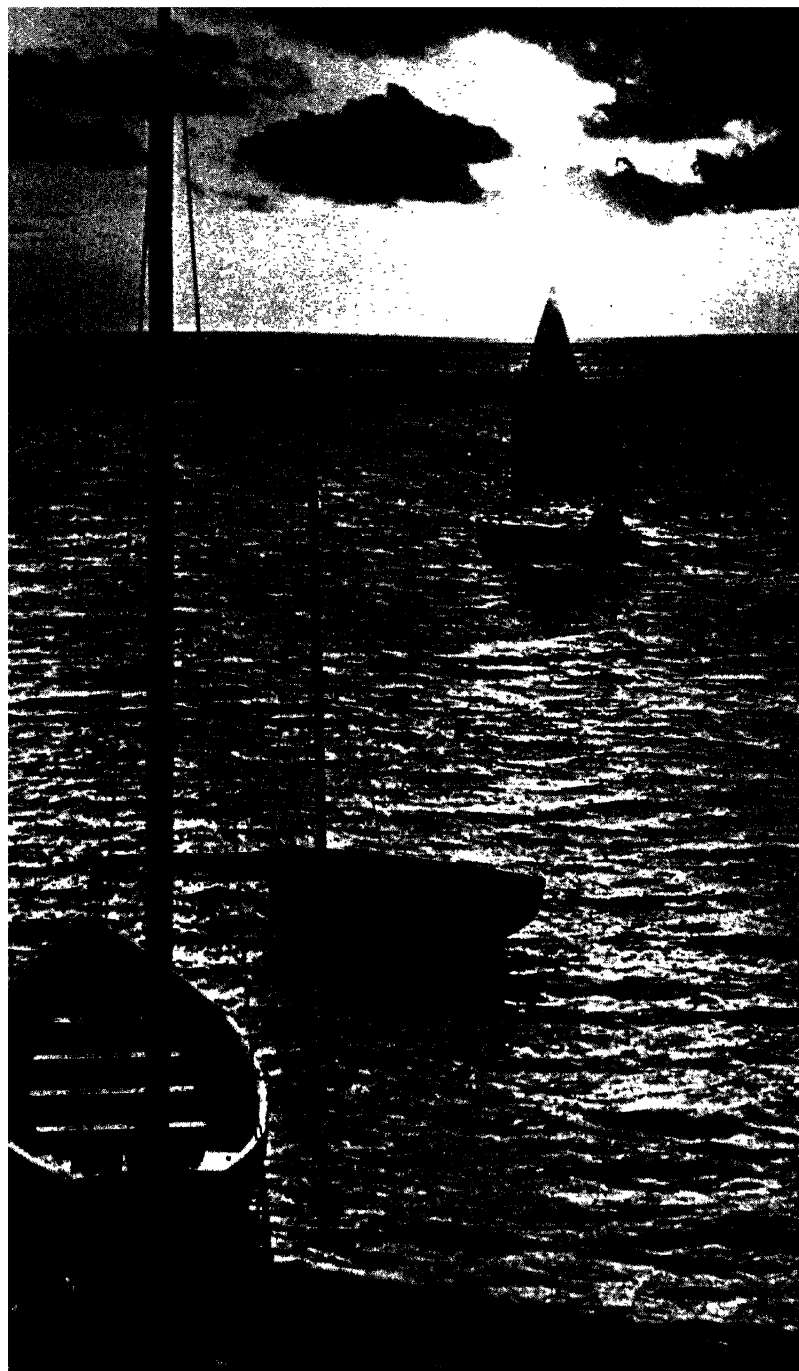
One must, of course, accept the new development at its true value. To be quite frank, little of the noise can be heard on the promenade itself. And in recent years, when the upper middle classes of the North Country, from which Southport has always drawn the greater proportion of its visitors, have been among the greatest sufferers from post-war economic measures, the municipal coffers have been enriched by the more carefree spenders who find the appeal of roundabout and cyclone coaster more attractive than that of military band and beflowered garden.

Yes, Southport is changing, just as the tides have changed. Perhaps the tempo is a little faster. Perhaps some of that gaiety from Pleasureland is overflowing to other parts of the town. Yet when last I walked on Lord Street when the sun was shining and the flowers were out, there was still that well-dressed, leisurely moving crowd that has been there since I was a boy. Even when an excursion train sent its crowds into the streets, few stayed in Lord Street. Rather did they make their way to the Marine Lake and Pleasureland—and, within a few minutes, Lord Street had regained the stateliness which is its own indelible right.

2

Forget the pleasure park for a moment or two, and turn into the nearby Victoria Park. There one finds tennis courts and bowling greens—and perhaps turns one's nose at the sight of a sandy bank or dune with limestone boulders strewn hither and thither, and wonders why a discerning council makes no attempt to tidy up the mess or finish whatever ambitious scheme was to be put in hand. Yet Victoria Park and, in particular, that same somewhat untidy bank have their place in Southport's modern way of life; for here, in the third week of August, is held a flower-show that has come to be regarded as one of the greatest floral displays the world over.

Instituted so recently as in 1924, the Southport Flower Show had achieved a position as the largest in the world before the outbreak of war in 1939; and after a lapse during the war years it was revived again in 1947, when over 114,000 people paid for admission during the three days, and it was obvious that the claim





for size was being upheld. Size alone, however, is no criterion of a good show. One must apply other tests to this great Lancashire floral exhibition to make a true assessment of its worth. Suffice it to say that scarcely a leading horticulturist in the country is without representation in the trade exhibits, and that there are usually about 3,000 entries in the competitive classes.

The story of post-war Southport flower-shows has been one of continued expansion, but there have been signs of late that the organisers are aiming at consolidation rather than further expansion. On my recent visits I have wondered if we have now got the pattern which will be adhered to for some years to come in the various horticultural marquees and the rock-garden terrace—that same sandy slope where the rocks are placed here and there at other times of the year—which is now one of the most famous features of the show.

Such a consolidation policy seems in keeping with current demands. For some time now, in fact ever since the show restarted after the war, it has been increasingly obvious that Southport exhibitors were thinking more and more in terms of the week-end gardener; but more recently there have been signs of a rapid tightening of purses, and these, unless something unforeseen comes along to arrest this decline in trade, must inevitably result in the disappearance of those sensational but expensive displays that have added an exotic touch to the great marquee in the past. One notices this specially in the orchids. For a time we were treated to jungle tableaux in which the rare blooms flourished in settings akin to their natural surroundings in steamy Burma, or elsewhere in the sub-tropical regions. As the marquee got hotter and hotter as the crowds gathered towards midday, one certainly got a true impression of such a display. Now, the orchid exhibitors seem content with less lavish settings. Indeed, in its magnificent floral display, no less than in its holiday trade, Southport is being compelled to march in line with existing economic conditions.

Whatever changes take place, however, one feels that the terrace of rock gardens will remain constant. During the three days of the show one forgets the appearance of that sandy bank during the remainder of the year and gets the impression that those rock gardens, laid out with such attention to detail, are a permanent feature of the park. Reginald Kaye, of Silverdale, in the north of the county, works wonders with the limestone that came in the

first place from the North Lancashire hill of Hamps Fell, above Grange over Sands, and produces a combination of grey stone, greensward, and pools fed by a cascading stream which is just sheer delight. Messrs T. R. Hayes and Sons, of Ambleside, in the Lake District, use waterworn Westmorland limestone, and Messrs Hensall and Sons, of Matlock Bath, make use of their great blocks of Derbyshire dolomite to produce a magical effect.

I must be fair. It is not just a matter of rearranging the same rocks year after year. The huge blocks are used for the foundations. It would be too costly to renew them every time the show is held. But a quantity of new stone is always incorporated in the final structure.

Inside the marquees one can be sure of seeing the great spikes of multi-coloured gladioli and gaily striped foliage plants, giant cacti and tropical water plants, tall regal delphiniums and roses of every shade and colour, all blending into that kaleidoscope of colour that one has come to regard as so integral a part of the Southport Show. I have been attending these shows for several years now and never fail to be thrilled by the colourful spectacle, and, indeed, there seems to be almost a continuity from one year's show to the next. Not until there has been time for an interrogation of the exhibitors does one realise that changes are taking place, and these, closely tied with general economics, really affect the concealed heart of things and not the face.

One thing, however, has been apparent at the post-war Southport Shows, and that is the judges seem to work with their eyes on utility as well as on decorative effect, so that it has become almost the recognised thing for the £850 trophy for the best exhibit in the show to go to a collection of vegetables. The winning displays have to be seen to be believed. On a vast half-circle, covering some 800 square feet or so, one finds symmetrical cones and pyramids of carrots and cucumbers, tomatoes and radishes, beets and onions, and all the accepted members of the kitchen garden, arranged in such a way that they lose nothing when compared with the colourful beauty of an array of flowers. These vegetable exhibits make still-life pictures of grace and charm which never fail to attract the crowds, even in a marquee where the very atmosphere is heavy with floral scents.

It would seem that Southport has determined to make the promotion of floral displays its own special prerogative. In 1938

it was decided to launch an autumn chrysanthemum show, and, true to the spirit that had built up the great summer show, the committee announced its intention of making this the outstanding event of its kind outside the London area.

Then, in 1952, came the first spring flower show, a three-day affair; and if the attendance was somewhat disappointing it must be remembered that, whatever a political map of England may show, the North is traditionally conservative in outlook and that the idea of spring shows is yet in its infancy.

The promoters were fortunate in having a small but established show to serve as a nucleus. For some years before, an enthusiastic group of members of the Alpine Garden Society had been organising their own show at this time of the year, and this was incorporated in the Corporation's initial effort.

No one would, of course, attempt to compare either the spring or autumn shows with the older established summer one. They are indoor affairs, and so far the organisers have wisely attempted nothing on spectacular lines. However, the trade exhibitors know that when Southport organises anything to do with flowers the result will be worth-while, and the two recent innovations join with the August show in establishing the town's claim for a permanent place on the horticultural map of England.¹

3

The floral charms of the area, however, are not limited to the promotion of shows. Only a short distance south of Southport are the extensive dunelands at Ainsdale and Freshfield, which have long been favourite haunts of the Lancashire botanist. Not only is there a rich profusion of plants but some rare finds have been made there. Indeed, a report by the Nature Reserves Investigation Committee, under the chairmanship of the Rt Hon Lord Mac-Millan, dealing with the establishment of *National Nature Reserves and Conservation Areas in England and Wales* (December, 1945), described the sand-dunes at Ainsdale as "the finest example of north-west coast calcareous sand-dunes, with numerous slacks and a unique flora".

Even apart from the natural history interest, to see this great area of high sandhills and dunes, held together by the sharp-

* ¹ At the time of writing the chrysanthemum show is in abeyance and the spring show run by the Alpine Garden Society.

spiked star-grass, is to get an idea of what the Lancashire coast once looked like hereabouts, and to marvel at the development of modern Southport in such surroundings.

Like so much else here, the dunes seem to be the result of the pranks and tricks of the tides. Five hundred years ago, we are told, the problem was not that of a retreating tide but of actual land erosion hereabouts. Indeed, we have a tale of the ancient manor of Argermeols and of nearby Aynesdale, obviously the forerunner of the present Ainsdale, both being lost through the inroads of the sea.

Such stories are no mere flights of fancy. They can be substantiated by a perusal of the old records of Cockersand Abbey, a monastic foundation on the marshy south side of the Lune Estuary, of which, again due to the tricks of the tide, only the scantiest ruins remain. Both manors had disappeared by the middle of the fourteenth century, for a deed of 1346 refers to "Argar-mele, which is now annihilated by the sea, and there is no habitation there".

An earthquake which occurred in the year 1328, "the greatest ever known in England", has been credited with causing a general sinking of land in many parts of the west coast. This, naturally enough, meant the lowering of what could never have been more than a minor coastal ridge, so that a high tide had little difficulty in breaking through and flooding the plains on which the two manors and, likely as not, a number of farms stood. Once there the sea stayed, at least, for several centuries.

Then came another of those periodic changes which have occurred to bring about alterations in the coastline of South-west Lancashire. The sea began to retreat, quite slowly at first, without, one supposes, producing anything like the same drama as when the tide had burst through in the first part of the fourteenth century. The retreating tide left behind its sand, and the prevailing winds began to pile some of that sand into the great dunes we have today. As the dunes grew, so did the barrier between sea and land become more formidable, and in the end it was this barrier which accelerated the withdrawal of the waters.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about it all is that geologists and others tell us that today the high-water mark is probably the same as it was during the Norman Conquest. In the meantime, the water has been in and then gone out again. The biggest change has been in the accumulation of so much sand. What was once

quite fertile land is buried beneath it, and somewhere beneath the dunes are the lost manors.

There were, however, fears of another form of inundation, when the prevailing south-westerly winds began to drive the sand inland. So long ago as in the year 1711, local landowners made it obligatory for their tenants to plant a certain amount of star-grass (*Ammon phila arenaria*) each year, and in 1742 an Act of Parliament made it a criminal offence to remove any star-grass from sections of both the Lancashire and Cumberland coasts. In 1893 the work of the star-grass was supplemented by the planting of Corsican pines, and today over 2,000 acres of duneland between Ainsdale and Formby have been afforested.

Even these precautions, however, have not entirely prevented the shifting of the sands. In 1911 a strong gale moved one of the hills a distance of between 100 and 150 yards, and in so doing exposed the wrecks of seven wooden vessels, each between 200 and 300 tons. They lay in line, one with another, and it was assumed that at one time some freshwater stream had entered the sea between Ainsdale and Freshfield, and the vessels had been beached at the mouth. The wrecks remained on view for but a couple of days. There came another strong wind, the sands again accumulated, and they were buried again.

Beneath the sand, however, is a great peat bog, a relic of the once great forests that covered what is now Liverpool Bay, and its presence has added to the peculiar topography of the area. The peat becomes saturated with water, and has resulted in the formation of freshwater lakes, or slacks, as they are locally called, between the sandhills. In winter their area is extended and they become quite deep pools, and even in summer they retain sufficient water to affect the flora and, in effect, make the actual sandhills bloom.

Another interesting feature is the presence of several varieties of plant one normally associates with limestone areas; and this has been attributed to the presence of calcium carbonate due to the many sea-shells that have become mixed with the sand, and produced conditions similar to those of the hills of the Craven area of Yorkshire and the limestone country of Derbyshire.

The wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) is one of the varieties that finds a permanent home here, and, indeed, so profusely does it grow that it produces a lovely carpet in many parts. Here, too,

Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) is common, although the plants in the main are somewhat smaller than those one finds in other districts. Indeed, the dunes of Flanders are said to be the only other place where one can find Grass of Parnassus of a type corresponding to that at Ainsdale.

The variety of plants to be found at Ainsdale is alone sufficient to warrant its conservation as a nature reserve, but these South Lancashire dunelands have given the botanical world at least one exclusive plant of its own. This is the Duneland orchid, *Epipactis dunensis*, which was first recorded as a new species by the late J. A. Whelden, author of the *Flora of West Lancashire*. So far as is known, this species cannot be found anywhere else. In the guide to the district, issued by the town's newspaper, *The Southport Visitor*, Mr John Clegg, a prominent local naturalist, tells us:

"The district is also notable as having provided the only specimens ever recorded of *Erythaea latifolia*, one of the Centauries, but as no specimens have been seen here for many years, it is feared that this plant is now lost to the British flora."

On the other hand, we have another rarity discovered at Ainsdale some years ago and now well established—the so-called American rush, which is really a "sedge" and has now quite a colony of its own in the vicinity of Massam's slack. The nearest haunt to Ainsdale is one at St Owen's Pond, Jersey, in the Channel Islands.

Time was when the Ainsdale dunes were almost as rich in birds as they are in flowers, but the facts that the nearby beaches, with their long stretches of firm sand, constitute a favourite motoring place, and that picnic parties make regular incursions among the sandhills during the nesting season, have tended to drive many of the birds away to more favourable haunts.

Thirty years or so ago, there was a large ternery here, although even then it had diminished in size from the last century when, it is said, anything up to 1,000 pairs of common tern would nest on the Ainsdale dunes, and there was a deal of egg collecting on the part of the local folk. However, a year or two before the war nearly a hundred nests were recorded here.

The Arctic tern also colonised the Ainsdale dunes about the year 1910, but was never present in any great strength, and only a few pairs were being recorded by the late 1930s. On the other hand,

the Sandwich tern, largest of our British nesting terns, deserted in 1916.

The decline in numbers of nesting terns coincided with the increasing influx of motorists and other visitors. Although the closing of the nearby beaches as a war-time defensive precaution brought about a period of sanctuary for the birds, the relaxation of these measures meant that most of the terns left again; and while a few pairs still manage to survive, the colony is very much reduced in size.

There is no doubt that could full protective measures be instituted here the Ainsdale dunes would soon become a leading bird sanctuary, for the natural conditions are ideal. We got an indication of this in the early summer of 1938 when the little tern returned after an absence of fifteen years, and there were high hopes of its again colonising its old haunt. However, the nests were robbed.

The following year there were three nests, one of which was placed right on the shore with hundreds of motor cars and holiday makers around. A party of Merseyside bird-lovers placed a ring of stakes around this nest in the hope of causing motor cars to make a deviation. Unfortunately, this attracted attention to the nest, with the inevitable result.

Man, however, is not the only creature who has contributed to the disappearance of the terns. The black-headed gull is a pirate of the first order, plundering the nests and killing the young chicks. This bird began to colonise Ainsdale as far back as 1873, and by 1933 some 200 pairs were nesting there. However, at that time a warden was being employed under the auspices of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and due to his excellent work the gull colony was virtually wiped out.

In his *Birds of the Liverpool Area*, published in 1941, Mr Eric Hardy recorded some thirty-two species, some twenty of which were regular, as nesting in this vicinity; and many of these, including a number of waders and the shelduck, are still to be found.

Ainsdale's charm for the bird-lover, however, is not restricted to summer only. Late autumn brings huge flights of migrating knot and dunlin to join British species, like the curlew from the high moors, the lapwing, and the redshank, in foraging among the miles of sand left behind by the retreating tides.

I have visited Ainsdale at this time of the year and been thrilled

by the great clouds of waders flying past along the edge of the tide. In the distance they appear as a thin dark cloud on the horizon, then the whole flock turns as one bird, and what was a dark cloud becomes one of shimmering silver as the birds reveal their lighter underparts. On occasion, the winter flocks of knots—birds that breed in the Arctic regions and then, as winter comes to the cold north, spread south to the African coasts, the Mediterranean seaboard, and even the sandy lands around the Arabian Sea—have stretched for well over a mile as the birds have followed the water's edge off the Ainsdale shore.

Sometimes, too, rarer species turn up at Ainsdale, like the red-necked phalarope which Mr Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald saw there in 1938, and the lovely black-and-white avocet, which recently returned to the coasts of East Anglia, recorded on these dunelands some thirty years ago. Equally exciting were the two bee-eaters which Mr Leonard Rigby saw in his Ainsdale garden on the 8th October, 1946, and which remained in the district for a month.

The Ainsdale slacks also provide a breeding haunt for hundreds of Natterjack toads (the name of which comes from the same origin as "adder" and refers to a yellow zigzag line which runs down the centre of the back). During the spawning season I have heard the "rattle" of the mating amphibians long before I reached the slacks. Locally they are called "Southport nightingales". The sand lizard, too, can regularly be seen here.

Formby, some seven or eight miles down the coast from Southport, can be regarded as marking the southern boundary of "Holiday Lancashire". The place is attractive, despite the fact that a good service of trains has made it almost a "dormitory" for Liverpool and Merseyside. There is a sunniness about the place, and in spite of the fact that Formby, like so many villages in this neighbourhood, is built on sand, the atmosphere is one of the garden type of residential place. Indeed, the annual summer flower show, which celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in the July of 1953, is one of the "highlights" of the West Lancashire horticultural year.

Nearly two miles of sandy lanes, leading across the dunes, separate modern Formby from the coast; but time was when the inhabitants actually lived by the sea, and the site of ancient Formby is now covered by the sandhills. Once more we have the story of inundation and subsequent retreating of the tides. Between

the years 1300 and 1500 the sea, as at Ainsdale, covered much of what is now sand. Then the Mersey began to pile its sand over the area, and the rapidly growing sandhills thrust back the waters.

Man followed the retreating sea. A thriving little community gathered on the north side of the Alt estuary, and a record of the year 1690 speaks of the wealth of gardens and even orchards. Two decades later, according to John Formby, of Formby Hall:

"There was a fishing hamlet and a pier which is said to have stood some 600 yards north-west of the present St Luke's Church. I have it at second-hand from Rev Robert Gort that his old friend, when a boy, saw the troops embark at Formby pier, to go to quell the rebellion in Scotland. Now this must have been in the 1715, not 1745, rising, for in the '30s of the 18th century the place was destroyed by sand. I have heard that there was a great discussion whether the docks should be built at Liverpool or Formby about 1700."

Whatever aspirations towards establishing a port the old inhabitants of Formby might have had were defeated by the old enemy of this part of the Lancashire coast—sand. During the first decade of the eighteenth century the channel began to silt up. That marked the beginning of the decline. Less than a century later, old Formby—gardens and orchards as well—had been surrendered to the sandhills. Nothing could make a more complete burial of the past.

Yet it is here, right among the dunes and in the shadow of the pines, that the little church of St Luke still stands, and houses not a few reminders of the forgotten centuries. An old font that is said to go back a thousand years or so is still preserved. Now, ecclesiastical historians tell us that only churches of importance had fonts at so early a date, so that there are some grounds for the statement that here was once "The Holy Place" of the district.

The old font lay neglected in a local farmyard for a considerable time, and seems to have served as a sharpening spot for scythes. Consequently, it is hard to find grounds for verifying the claim that originally it was carved with twenty-three sides.

The church porch contains a mutilated gravestone on which the inscription "Richardus Formbie, Hic Jacet" can be made out. This refers to Richard Formby, arm-bearer to King Henry IV, who was interred in York Minster. In 1840, however, came the

great fire at the Minster, caused by a mad eccentric named Martin, when a huge piece of masonry fell on the stone and made the cracks now to be seen. After this, the stone was transferred to the church on the Lancashire shore where many generations of the Formby family, who still live at Formby Hall (just off the Southport road and near the entrance to the air station at Woodvale), have been buried.

Another interesting curiosity is a block of stone with a rude cross on one side, known as the Godstone. Time was when the bodies of deceased were carried thrice round this stone in the direction of the sun, a custom which is said to have commemorated the three days between the Crucifixion and the Rising of the Lord.

One would hardly expect to find important links with agriculture in such a sandy area, yet there is a local story which claims that in 1565 an Irish vessel carrying potatoes was wrecked off the coast and the cargo was washed ashore. Some of the vegetables were planted, and this episode has been cited by some writers as being responsible for the introduction of the potato into the north of England.

Today, however, asparagus rather than the potato is the most interesting crop of the area, and, indeed, the sandhills at Formby form one of the chief asparagus-farming regions in the land, with something like 150 acres under cultivation at the present time.

Asparagus farming was first introduced by the Formby family about a hundred years ago, and since then a number of farms have been established in the area. The planted areas continue to produce good crops for as long as fifteen years, but after that they are abandoned, the old plants either uprooted or ploughed deep into the sand, and either potatoes or peas grown on the vacant sites. This, of course, means that the asparagus fields are constantly changing in distribution; that always there must be a certain amount of clearing for new seed beds and for planting out the year-old stocks.

There is no short cut to asparagus growing. It takes at least three years from the planting of the seeds to the gathering of the first crop, and during that time there is little respite. On land so deficient in organic matter, heavy manuring is essential. Farmyard manure is chiefly employed, but many growers add some such organic fertiliser as fish manure. Salt, too, is added from time to

time, but lime presents little problems. I have already mentioned how these sandhills support a surprising type of flora one usually associates with the limestone uplands, sustained by the calcareous shells forming part of the sand.

The preparation of the land starts in December, and any new ground must first of all be attacked by a "nicking" spade in order to clear any of the surface vegetation, such as the star-grass and the creeping willow, or "black tree", as it is called hereabouts. Afterwards the whole is ploughed one graph deep, and then a further graph is taken out with a spade. There is a lot of manual work in asparagus growing, and although both plough and harrow can do a great deal in the initial breaking-up processes the final crop only results as the outcome of a deal of back-aching work with the spade.

A good layer of manure is then placed at the foot of each trench, and the year-old plants spaced out. In such a sandy area a night of wind can cause a lot of damage to any crops, and there is always the possibility of the ridges being blown down and the young plants being buried. To obviate this, star-grass is placed on the ridges. The long blades are cut and the tufts of grass inserted in the shape of a "V". No roots are introduced or the grass would spread and smother the crops. The tufts last for about two years and then rot away.

Every year more manure is added, alternate rows receiving their quota each season; and after the second year the plants are earthed-up in much the same manner as potatoes. Cutting starts in March or April of the third year and continues to the end of June.

The preparing of the sticks for the market gives casual employment to many people of the Formby district, although the days when thirty to forty packers could be seen at work in one shed seem to have come to an end. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of folks willing to help in selecting the best sticks and placing them in wooden gauges, each one capable of containing 35-40 sticks, according to the size. This job is mainly done by the womenfolk, and some of the older hands recall the days before gauges when they knelt on the floor and counted the sticks by hand.

An interesting point about asparagus is that the method of making up the bundles differs from one district to another, so that it should be possible to spot the place of growth when they appear in the shops. In the Vale of Evesham, perhaps the biggest

asparagus-growing district in the country, the bundles take the form of rectangular blocks fastened with twigs; but at Formby the bundles are cylindrical and tied with raffia. The crates, each containing some 80 bundles, go to the wholesale greengrocers in Manchester and Liverpool.

Talk to some of the people who are engaged in this sorting and packing and you will hear some rich stories of the days when they went along to the open markets to sell their produce. On one occasion a husband, arriving home late, placed a bundle of asparagus on the table, and on getting up next morning was amazed when his wife greeted him with the remark, "Call that stuff firewood! It wor' green. It took ages to get the fire agate!" Another customer turned up full of complaints. She had thrown away the purple ends of the sticks and boiled the white, and now decried asparagus as being like boiled straw!

In November comes the task of gathering seeds. So long ago as in 1763 Philip Miller, in his *Gardener's Dictionary*, stressed the need for good seed and wrote: "In the procuring of this, there should be particular care to get it from a person of skill who may be depended upon for his choice of the shoots, and integrity in supplying the best seeds." The majority of Formby growers, however, collect their own seed, allow it to dry during the winter, and then sow it in April in special beds, dug to one spade in depth and well harrowed; leaving it there until the young plants are ready for putting in the permanent fields the following spring.

Such then is the story of asparagus cultivation in one of the sandiest areas in the country. That it has been successful is apparent not only from the fact that there is a good demand for it but also that Formby-grown asparagus has won prizes at many of the leading shows in the country.

5

Let us follow the coast from Southport in the opposite direction, and see what effect the action of the tides has had on the villages and lands on the south side of the Ribble estuary. Here, however, the withdrawal of the sea has left behind not so much a vast area of sand as a rich stretch of agricultural country, with potato growing and market gardening as the two main occupations of those working in close contact with the land.

A study of mid-eighteenth-century maps enables us to get a clearer picture of what has taken place here. One, dated 1760, shows a bay between Marshside and Crossens, formerly villages but now suburbs at the northern end of Southport. The name Crossens itself is doubtlessly derived from "the cross on the ness", and, again, old maps plainly indicate the presence of the ness, or point, from where travellers set their way northwards to cross the fords of the Ribble estuary, usually accompanied by a guide who lived at Banks. The cross would serve as a landmark for those making the journey in the southwards direction.

The withdrawal of the sea, however, did not result in the formation of dunes, as was the case farther down the coast. Instead, there was a great marsh; and even a low cliff of boulder clay which was here a hundred years or so ago finally disappeared into the flat marsh. Man took a hand in 1834 and 1860 by building embankments to ensure that the withdrawal of the sea would be permanent. At first there seems to have been little intention of using the newly won land for the purpose of agriculture. Instead it became a preserve for game, and two gamekeepers were installed. However, poaching was common. Not only the locals participated, but crowds of folk from Preston and Wigan came along and helped themselves.

Towards the end of the century, the local landowners, the Heskeths of nearby Rufford Old Hall (a fine Tudor mansion beside the Preston-Southport road which is now in the possession of the National Trust and is open to the public) realised the value of the land on the southern side of the Ribble estuary from an agricultural point of view, and a greater area—something like a mile and a half in depth—of the foreshore opposite Hesketh Bank was won permanently from the marshes by a further sea embankment.

Indeed, the whole of this section of West Lancashire is in reality land which has been mainly won from the waters, sea and inland. Time was when, as the countryman in Western Ireland is said to have informed a traveller, "the land was mostly water", and inland from the coast was the vast lake of Martin Mere. My Speed's map of Lancashire (1610) still marks it as a formidable sheet of water between Southport and Ormskirk; but by that time it must have shrunk a deal, for Baines in his *History of Lancashire* tells us that it once had a circumference of eighteen

miles, and, somewhat dubiously I should say, that it was the largest lake in England.

It was really a product of those post-glacial times when the retreating ice left behind an undulating countryside of ridges and hollows, and the latter became filled with water. Legend informs us that Vivian, mistress of Merlin, the fabulous wizard of King Arthur's Court, brought a baby from the King of Benoit in Brittany, and that the infant was kept in a strange palace beneath the waters of this very lake. Later, that same child became the noted Sir Lancelot de Lac, and after a terrific fight with Tarquin, the Saxon chief who lived on the fringe of the Roman city of Mancunium, now Manchester, became head of the surrounding district, which became known as Lancelotshire. Some go further, and say that Lancashire is a corruption of the older name.

Even the Arthurian legends, however, were not sufficient to ensure the permanent existence of the lake. As in the case of other similar relics of the Ice Age, the area covered by the waters began to shrink; and even when Speed's map was published they covered far less than had been the case five or six centuries before, and, indeed, Martin Mere could then have been little more than a shallow pond of the marshy variety. Perhaps the most vivid reminder of the folk who lived round its banks and, doubtless, fished from its waters was to be the surname Rimmer, obviously derived from those who lived on the rim, or banks, of the mere. Even today, the Rimmers account for well over 40 per cent of the population of the district.

It was, of course, obvious that could the waters be drained away permanently, good agricultural land would be left; and even so long ago as in the year 1692, the prospects of cultivation proved stronger than the Arthurian stories. "At great expense," we are told, Thos. Fleetwood, of Banks Hall, commenced the task of reclamation, "so as to be able to use the ground for tillage." His method was to construct "trenches and flood gates with banks to shut out the waters that still kept it marsh and moorish ground."

Mr Fleetwood's scheme met with sufficient success to encourage other local landowners, whose estates contained parts of the lake and its surroundings, to tackle the work of reclamation. The climax to an undertaking which has been so beneficial to the agricultural development of West Lancashire came towards the end of the eighteenth century, when Thomas Eccleston, of

Scarisbrick, introduced a scientific scheme whereby he had canals cut to carry away the bog water, and also established a pumping station at the mouth of the former exit stream from the Mere at Crossens. By an ingenious system of having floodgates fitted with paddles which could be raised when the tide was out to keep his channels from being choked with mud and sand, he succeeded in bringing a century of labour to a successful close, and ensured the addition of some 33,000 valuable acres of good agricultural land. His drainage mileage alone was between forty-five and fifty, but succeeding trustees of the Scarisbrick Estate realised the importance of the schemes, and from time to time the pumping station at Crossens has been overhauled and the machinery brought into line with modern developments.

Notwithstanding this we hear of an incursion of the sea at Banks in 1807, but this was followed by more work on the construction of a sea wall, and soon the amount of acreage reclaimed from the sea had swollen to well over 7,000. The effect of this has been tremendous. Here are some of the richest potato-growing fields in the whole of Northern England; here, too, has developed in little more than a century a "glasshouse" farming industry, with tomatoes and lettuce as the principal crops, which is today regarded as one of the most important branches of Lancashire agriculture.

One effect of this extensive system of reclamation has been to change the character of whole villages. Hesketh Bank—which was Hesketh-with-Becconsall until a few years ago, and the new name has never been really accepted by the older folk, who will agree to either Hesketh or Becconsall but dislike Hesketh Bank—has swelled from a fishing village of eight hundred folk some sixty years ago to an agricultural and horticultural village of over two thousand inhabitants. Its annual show in September is quite an outstanding event in the local farming and gardening world.

Nearer Southport, Banks and Marshside no longer live up to their names, but both still have their in-shore fishermen, shrimpers and shell-fish gatherers mainly, who use horse-and-cart to get to their gathering grounds on the wet sands of the Ribble estuary, and even so far out as off Ainsdale and Formby. Here too agriculture, and especially the "glasshouse" method of farming, has developed; and Banks follows the custom of the other villages of West Lancashire by organising its annual show during the summer months.

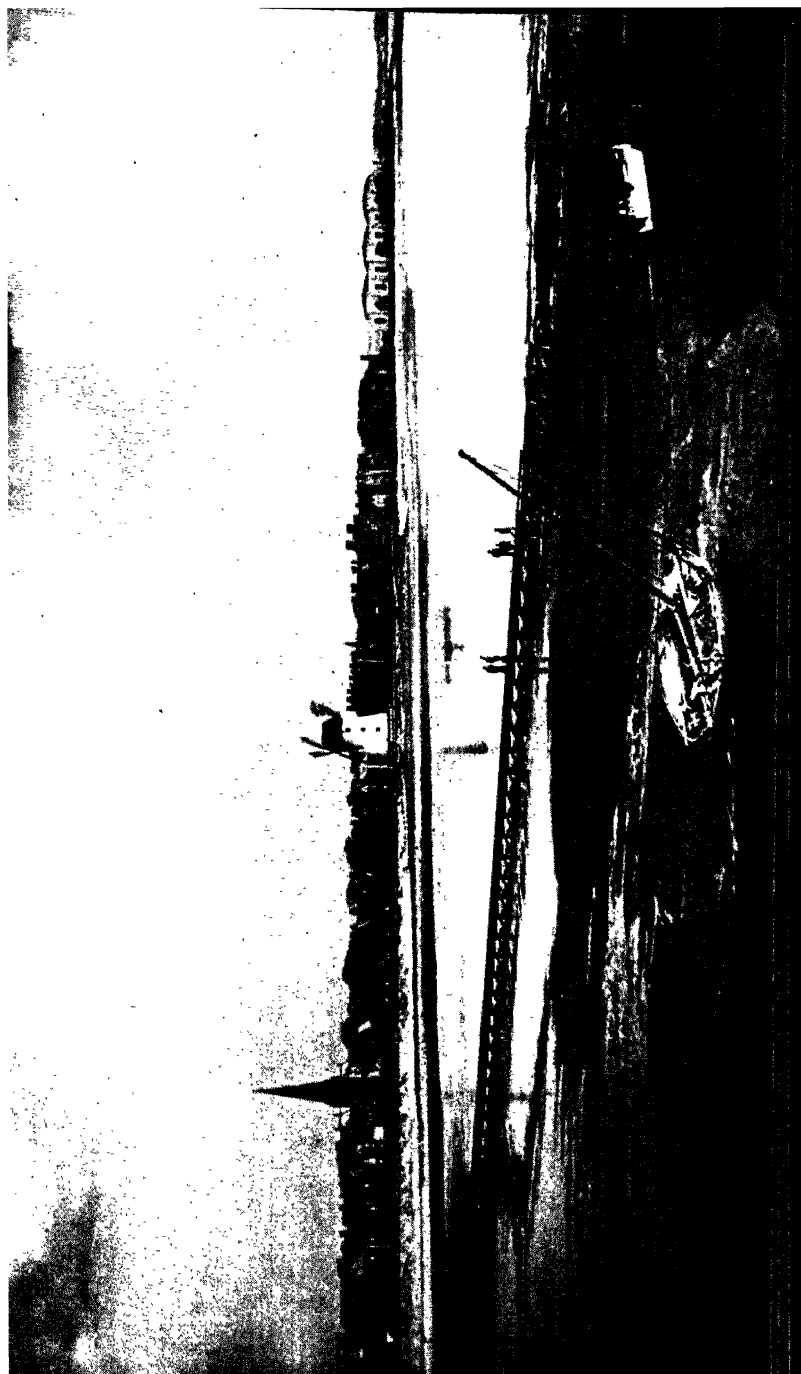
The effects of reclamation have also been the cause of a deal of controversy regarding the silting-up of the Ribble estuary itself. When in the early part of the present century the Southport Channel began to silt up and make it impossible for boats of any size to approach the town, and, about the same time and of much more consequence, the accumulation of sand in the Ribble began to interfere with shipping entering and coming out of Preston docks, inquiries were held and the reasons for the silting put forward by experts.

There was considerable difference of opinion. In a report to the Preston Corporation in 1908 regarding this silting, the extensive reclamation work on the south side of the estuary was held responsible. Three years later, in a report to the Southport Corporation, the experts disagreed with the previous verdict and recommended that walls be built on each side of the actual channel to strengthen the tidal action. Whichever of the two directly opposing opinions was correct does not seem to have been established, but when Sir John Barry gave evidence before the Reclamation and Unemployed Labour Commission about the same time he strongly recommended that any further reclamation work be discontinued, and this seems to have been adopted.

Nevertheless, the work *has* gone on, not as the result of man's efforts but through the unaided work of Nature. Indeed, the opinion has been often expressed that it would be better to reclaim on scientific lines and make the land recovered immediately suitable for agricultural purposes rather than let Nature continue its own course and then man have the job of cultivating afterwards.

Today, the unequal struggle continues, and in the wake of the retreating tide are miles and miles of saltings, mud flats, and sand. No one can pretend that this section of coastline makes the slightest contribution to the Lancashire holiday trade. Neither does it assist the county's agriculture. The only folk who benefit are wildfowlers and naturalists.

Indeed, in the 1920's wild geese began to make the marshes hereabouts a regular winter haunt; and today anything from 200 to 2,000 pink-foot geese can be seen each year, the area usually being regarded as the largest gathering ground south of the Solway Firth. Normally they make their appearance about the middle of September, although odd birds are often seen towards the end of August.





CHAPTER II

THE FYLDE

I

WEST of the great trunk road from Preston to Lancaster is an area which, somehow, stands apart from the rest of Lancashire—the flat, prosperous land of the Fylde.

Here are villages where the passing of time has brought comparatively little change; here, too, are extensive fields and pastures where the grass stands green in the early summer, and the ripening corn brings its golden hues as the season advances; and the herds of dairy cattle serve to emphasise that here is a part of Lancashire where the ancestral roots of its folk delve deep into the rich Fylde earth. It is a land of low horizons, so that the setting sun sinks deep into the west to throw into silhouette church spires and solidly built farmsteads, and even gaunt old windmills which, though now mainly devoid of their sails, still make a valuable contribution to the West Lancashire scene.

Today, I am afraid, the quiet, serene beauty of the Fylde countryside is hardly appreciated. Its mildly undulating roads appear to have one goal. And that goal is Blackpool, premier holiday resort of the north-west coast, and rarely, if ever, the objective of the wanderer in search of beauty.

In the far-distant days that followed the retreat of the glaciers, the Fylde was a thickly wooded area, with its forests stretching west into what is now part of the Irish Sea, and even today men working in the peat beds between the rivers Wyre and Lune uproot stocks which show something of the girth of the trees once flourishing there. The peat beds themselves are of a somewhat later development. There was a sinking of the land, with a consequent change in coastal contours, and, about the same time, the general climate became distinctly humid, with the result that vegetation decayed and peat began to accumulate. Glacial drifts caused elevations which still sustained their trees, but water gathered in the hollows, and there followed a period in which

marshland and forest fought for supremacy, with the former slowly but surely gaining the upper hand.

Indeed, Speed's map of Lancashire, which dates from 1610, shows a great deal of the southern part of the Fylde as marshland, and this marsh consisted of the very part of the coast upon which Blackpool and its nearby holiday towns now stand. There is also a fair-sized lake, Marton Mere—not to be confused with the Martin Mere mentioned in the preceding chapter—just north-east of the present situation of Blackpool itself.

By the early seventeenth century, however, the husbandmen of Fylde had already commenced the agricultural pursuits for which the district was to achieve fame, and the very term "Fylde" is generally accepted as having been given because of this process of creating meadow land out of timber and brushwood areas. Later, much of Marton Mere, as well as other adjacent waters and stretches of swamp were drained, just as similar stretches of land had been drained south of the Ribble, with the result that the area was developed into one of the richest farming regions in the whole of Northern England.

Time was when Fylde was regarded as the granary of the north-west, and even so recently as a decade or so ago some 35,000 acres were devoted to direct crops. In more recent years, however, there has been an increase in the grasslands, mainly at the expense of grain; so much so that many people today are asking whether it is economical to have somewhere in the neighbourhood of 60,000 acres of permanent grassland in an area so very well suited to the growing of corn.

Doubtless it is the direct result of this post-war swing over to grass that today we have here what must be one of the most heavily stocked areas in the whole country, for recent figures show that Fylde's 103,000 acres support some 63,000 head of cattle, 40,000 pigs, and 30,000 sheep in the summer months, and, of course, many more when the hogs, or gimmer lambs, from the hill flocks arrive to winter in the area.

We see the hills from whence the hogs come as we roam about the flattish lands of the Fylde. They form a permanent barrier on the eastern horizon, the hills of Bowland Forest, now mainly devoted to sheep, but before that a hunting forest, and, before that, a haunt of wild white cattle similar to those we can now find

in the parklands at Chillingham, in Northumberland, and at Cadzow, above the upper section of the Clyde.

The story of the wild cattle of Bowland is still continued far away from their original haunts. The monks of Whalley Abbey, in the Ribble valley, maintained a section of the herd in their great park long after the creatures had ceased to roam their native hills; and, following the Dissolution, the Whalley beasts came into the possession of the Assheton family, branches of whom had estates at Gisburne Park, near Clitheroe, and Middleton, near Manchester. The Gisburne herd persisted up to the middle of the last century; that at Middleton passed, by marriage, to Lord Suffield, of Gunton, sixteen miles north of Norwich. About the time the Gisburne herd died out, that at Gunton was broken up. Its descendants are today found in Colonel Gurney's herd of white cattle at Bawdeswell Hall, Norfolk.¹

We have wandered far from Lancashire, and, I am afraid, the wild cattle of Bowland have been forgotten. Not so the sheep. They come down to the Fylde plain in winter.

Approach those hills and near the eastern edge of the Fylde plain you come to the old market town of Garstang. The main road to Scotland goes through its centre and makes it quite a busy place. Yet Garstang retains many links with its past. It cannot shake off something of the air of a spot which once thrived in days when movement was more leisurely.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it was in that more leisured age that Garstang took on the title of the "metropolis of the Fylde." Its markets were resorted to by farmers from both the Fylde and the Bowland hills. Towards the end of November it housed the most important fairs of West Lancashire. First came the wool fair, then the following day it was the turn for the cattle—so many that houses and shops had to be barricaded to prevent damage from the number of animals that came through the streets—and on the last day it was horse-fair day. Now the wool goes direct from the shearings to some prosaic warehouse in the West Riding city of Bradford, and neither cattle nor horses create the slightest disturbance in Garstang's streets.

Garstang, however, long continued to display an interest in heavy horses, and for many years there was an annual parade of

¹ In recent years some of the cattle have been re-introduced into Lancashire by Mr H. Carpenter of Whitefield, near Manchester.

heavy-horse stallions to mark the commencement of the travelling season, and when breeders attended in order to satisfy their breeding requirements. So recently as in 1944 eight Shire and eight Clydesdale stallions were paraded, but by 1952 only three Shires were out.

The passing of these things agricultural has undoubtedly left a gap that cannot be filled. Garstang has been compelled to live in accordance with a place that bestrides one of the busiest trunk roads in the land. It has done so without changing its real character or even much of its outward appearance. Indeed, whenever I visit the place—and that is very often—I feel that if the horses and cattle again replaced the modern motor cars and coaches Garstang would quite easily adapt itself to the change. To slip back fifty or even more years would be the easiest thing imaginable here.

Other Fylde villages give the same impression. Nearer the heart of the Fylde is Kirkham, with a fair charter dating back to the thirteenth century, and, like Garstang, once noted for its cattle and livestock fairs. Then came a spell when cotton manufacturing replaced its markets as the chief thing of importance. Now the cotton industry has ceased there, and Kirkham is still essentially a market town. As at Garstang, it could slip back into its past without anyone noticing the change.

One senses something of the same atmosphere wherever one wanders about this Fylde countryside. Here are things that are changing, yet doing so without completely casting away the things that have been there almost from time immemorial. The traffic goes past in the direction of Blackpool; the hoardings display evidence of all the attractions of a modern holiday resort. To some people the Fylde is just a district to be passed through on the way to the sea; but to those of us who know it, Fylde is something dear, something precious, something that retains its past, and in doing so retains our affections as well.

2

Let us follow the Blackpool road westwards from Preston, that historic town which geographically and administratively but certainly not ethically might be regarded as the county capital. I find a certain sense of pleasure in the sight of a noble skyline of buildings on the higher ground on the north banks of the Ribble.

Preston certainly looks well as one approaches from east or south.

There is, however, little to excite enthusiasm as the western road leaves the town, goes through the suburbs, and then enters the flat Fylde countryside; but one soon realises how agriculture extends right to the edge of the built-up areas. On the left the Ribble, a sullen streak of lead, thrusts directly through the flat lands. Whatever meanderings might have characterised its course in the past, these have been checked by the activities of man. The final miles of a river that has its birth high among the Pennine hills of Yorkshire and has carved out a channel through much that is loveliest in the two adjacent counties, reveal a changed—and tamed—character.

Yet, however successfully man has harnessed the river, he has not placed the tides of the estuary under his command. Where the main road to Blackpool swings right in the direction of Clifton and so to Kirkham, keep straight ahead along the flats. And a mile or so farther on, turn left down a lane that leads towards the river, so that you can learn something of the effect of the tides hereabouts.

On these flat lands Mr Richard Tomlinson keeps a flock of cross-bred sheep, and while flooding is but an occasional danger to the average Lancashire sheep farmer, with his runs extending over the brown slopes of the Pennine hills and their western offshoots, Mr Tomlinson must keep the likelihood of floods constantly in mind.

His holding is, appropriately enough, named Marsh Farm, and his land consists of some 450 acres of level country, including over 200 acres of out-marsh grazing on the tide-washed flats immediately north of the river.

A comparison of the map of today with one of a century ago gives an idea of the type of land Mr Tomlinson has at his disposal. A hundred years ago much of it was permanently under water, and a high tide brought the floods well inland. A former lord of the manor instituted an intensive reclamation scheme, on much the same lines as was taking place at the same time on the opposite side of the river, and thousands of acres were won back from the tides.

Today, the extent of that scheme is indicated by a great bank which passes right across Mr Tomlinson's land, and that line can be traced through much of the farm country of the neighbouring Fylde. Further reclamation work resulted in the erection of another bank, and 300 acres of additional land were filched from the marsh.

It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the two banks, not only to Mr Tomlinson but to the surrounding area, yet the whole of their maintenance along their most vital stretches is his responsibility. In the last ten years he has spent over £1,500 in keeping them in repair. Farming here involves a capital outlay beyond that confined to strictly agricultural pursuits.

Between the two banks only exceptionally high tides coupled with a south-west gale can cause serious flooding, but this happened in March, 1907, and again in October, 1927. On the last occasion parts of the outer bank were completely washed away, and it was only the old, or inner, bank which kept the house and farm buildings from being completely flooded. As it was, the waters rose to a height of two feet inside some of the out-buildings, and some 150 tons of potatoes in clamp were ruined.

Beyond the outer bank and on the marsh, where the sheep graze, is a different matter. Normal tides result in sufficient land being left uncovered for the sheep to remain there in safety, but, even so, a watch must be maintained for the odd one that can bring disaster. High tides have a habit of creeping along the outer foot of the bank and so cutting off a retreat to safety. Hardly a day passes at Marsh Farm without the barometer being consulted and the shipping forecast for the Irish Sea listened to.

In summer a 26-ft tide with a strong south-west wind is the one fraught with danger. Provided there is no wind, anything less than this is unlikely to prove troublesome. In winter, however, it is another story. Then a 23-ft tide and a gale warning are sufficient to send Mr Tomlinson's shepherd out on to the marsh to bring the flocks back to the safer regions.

It was on this marshland sheep farm, some years ago, that I first met Old Horny, an aged ewe of nondescript breed who had then been living there for twelve years. She was bought as one of a pen in 1938. She was far from being an animal of show class, but looks and intelligence do not always go hand in hand together in the animal world, and certainly Old Horny was possessed of an activity of mind that one rarely associates with sheep. She was the tamest sheep I ever saw. When I arrived at the farm there was no sign of her, but Mr Tomlinson took me into a nearby field, called "Horny", and there came the veteran with both that year's and the preceding one's lambs in attendance.

Horny was almost invaluable on a farm where the tides can

spell so much danger. Instinct seemed to forewarn her of any exceptionally high tide, and, as natural leader of the flock, she could usually be relied on to bring the others well away from the water's edge.

On one occasion she was responsible for bringing several ewes that were on the point of lambing back to the farm when a great blizzard was blowing up.

Already some of the flock had their young lambs in the sheltered places adjoining the farm when Mr Tomlinson noticed that snow had commenced to fall, just after dusk. The snow was accompanied by a strong gale, and so, fearing that bad weather was about to develop, he went out into the fields. Now came the problem of getting the various nervous ewes through the gateways leading out of the fields and towards the farmyard. However, Mr Tomlinson hit on the idea of calling for Horny, and, as usual, she answered his call. The rest of the flock followed, and so the safety of more sheltered regions was reached.

Old Horny cost her owner less than a couple of pounds; no trophies or certificates ever came her way. Yet she was just as remarkable a creature as any prize-winner. Down on those Ribble marshes she was considered as being almost worth her weight in gold.

3

Little more than a mile west is Freckleton, a busy enough place during the summer months when the traffic streams through it on the way to and from the coastal towns. Few, then, have time to look at Freckleton, and, truth to tell, there is little to compel a pause. With the building of the modern road early in the century a change came over the place, the sort of change that has happened all too often to the villages that now stand in the hinterland of the Lancashire holiday towns, and the whole tempo of life was altered.

Let me quote the description of Freckleton in John Porter's *History of the Fylde*, published in 1876:

"The village is long and irregular, but contains sundry better class houses, and a cotton manufactory, belonging to Mr Sowerbutts, holding 320 looms. The inhabitants are chiefly employed in making sacking, sailcloth, ropes, etc. There is also a

shipbuilding yard, of which Mr Rawstone is the proprietor, where vessels, mainly for the coasting trade, are constructed."

Today, the cotton mill is still there, although it has changed hands several times since 1876, but of the trades connected with the sea and seafaring not one remains. Indeed, Freckleton is separated from the Ribble by its marsh, and it is difficult to even associate it with things maritime. Yet there are folk living there today who can speak of the days when anything up to forty men were regularly employed in making vessels of the three-master schooner type, and four-rope walks were active in the village.

Talk to some of these people and hear their stories of *The Welcome*, a three-master of 200 tons, and the largest vessel to sail beyond the Ribble from Freckleton. John Banks was her skipper, and his exploits are still remembered and discussed by those who can forget the changed times and take pride in the past links with the sea.

Old-time Freckleton, then, sent its ships down the Ribble, and also imported much of the Fylde's supply of coal from the pits near Wigan. This was brought by river and canal to the south side of the estuary and then, in the days before the river was dredged, brought by horse and cart across the sands and shallows left behind by the retreating tide.

It might easily have been that the reclamations on the north side of the estuary and the confining of the river to a fixed and dredged channel would have resulted in the life of the surrounding villages being a close parallel to those south of the Ribble. Fate has decided otherwise. Agriculture there certainly is, but there has been an influx of building following the construction of the road to the sea. Villages have somehow lost their character; agriculture has been compelled to compete with encroaching building developments. In many places the Fylde has changed little with the passing of a century, but hereabouts much has been lost.

Today, Freckleton, with its memories of seafaring growing dimmer as the older generation passes, makes no great contribution to the story of Holiday Lancashire. Rather has the reverse been the case. Holiday Lancashire has had its effect on Freckleton. Like the summer tourists, we pass on to Lytham—and leave it to its memories, which, like the lingering twilight glow, have a quiet serenity of their own.

Lytham—leafy Lytham they call it hereabouts, and the name is well chosen—is where we enter Holiday Lancashire again. Our introduction is a pleasant one. We have come across the flat lands, seen something of an unusual haunt of sheep and paused at a village whose ways warned us of impending changes to come; and here, at Lytham, we meet the type of holiday resort that somehow has managed to grow and, I suppose, alter its ways without quite subduing the past in the process.

Go on to the green that separates houses from the sea. There is a spaciousness about it that, I think, represents Lytham's character. You might be on one of the village greens that marked the Fylde of yesterday. There is nothing quite like the village green for giving atmosphere, as every poet and cricket enthusiast—and really there is a strong kinship between the two—knows quite well. Lytham certainly has atmosphere—and even now that more modern St Annes-on-the-Sea has joined forces with it to make the municipality of Lytham-St Annes, the older place has, in many ways, refused to submerge its individuality.

That green does much to conserve atmosphere. Even more so does the white-washed windmill, though shorn of its sails, that stands at one end of it. The Fylde is, of course, Lancashire's windmill land, and many a slight eminence above some old village retains the ruin of its old mill. This one was probably erected by Thomas Cookson, a well-known local benefactor, in the second half of the eighteenth century, but history has it that the first windmill in the district, if not in the whole country, was that built at Lytham, or Lethum (as it appears in old records), about the year 1190.

Lytham then formed part of the possessions of one Richard Fitz Roger who, after the custom of the time, gave lands to the church

“for the Salvation of my lord, Earl John, and for the souls of my Father and Mother, and mine and my heirs . . . as a pure and perpetual offering to God and the Blessed Mary and St Cuthbert, and the monks of Durham, all my estate at Lethum, with the church of the same vill, with all things appertaining to it, in order to build a house of their own order.”

The monks of Durham belonged to the Benedictine Order, and there is not the slightest doubt that a cell was established here on the north side of the Ribble estuary. But even the archaeological experts have never satisfactorily cleared up the exact place of location. The general belief is that Lytham Hall now stands on the site, and the late Mr W. T. Palmer, in his *Wanderings in Ribblesdale*, mentions that a nearby farmhouse dated 1598 contains some stained glass which may be from the windows. We do know, however, that about the time of the Reformation its annual income was £43 3s. 6d., and that it was dissolved as one of the "lesser monasteries" in the year 1537.

If details of this monastic foundation are strangely lacking, however, we have no dearth of information about Lytham church, which, like so many other churches on the Lancashire coast, has had a career chequered not so much through quarrels and strife but by the altering tides and changing fortunes of the coastline.

The existence of a church is mentioned in Richard Fitz Roger's gift. Even that is unlikely to have been the first church hereabouts, for we have it on the authority of Reginald of Durham that the original church at Lytham was built of shingle and was pulled down by the *grandfather* of Richard Fitz Roger, who substituted one of stone and dedicated it to St Cuthbert. Other authorities, however, claim that the Benedictine monks themselves were responsible for the change.

St Cuthbert's Church, however, outlived the nearby monastic cell. Nine years after the suppression of the lesser monasteries it was incorporated in the Diocese of Chester, and has been described as "a low building, constructed of cobble stones, the walls being more than a yard in thickness and penetrated by five windows, one of which was situated at the east end, and the others at the side."

In 1770 this church was supplanted by a rather more pretentious building, but this only remained in position for another sixty-four years. By then Lytham was earning some fame as a watering place. Lancashire folk had found the sea, and were coming by horse, cart, and carriage, and, of course, on foot. Most of them came at week-ends, and on the Sunday they went to church. And so, according to Porter: "Sixty-four years from the date of its erection this church was also pulled down, having

become unable to accommodate the increasing influxes of visitors during the summer." Ecclesiastical history may, at first sight, appear to have little connexion with the development of Holiday Lancashire, but here, at Lytham, there is a close affinity between the two.

That affinity is, indeed, not merely a matter of history. Today, when we are constantly being reminded of the decline in church-going, I know many churches—and chapels—in the Lancashire coastal towns where it is necessary to arrive well in advance of commencing time to get a seat for either morning or evening service. I have even known "Church Full" notices to be placed outside. It is an aspect of Holiday Lancashire not often appreciated, and certainly one that is rarely remembered when modern church-going is being discussed.

To return to Lytham. What kind of a place did these early visitors find? In the year 1799 one Captain Ratham has told us: "Lytham is a maritime village, which, since watering places have become so fashionable a summer's lounge, is now advanced to a place of some celebrity." That was at the time when the village must have been going through its initial teething stages in the way of development. Most of the existing cottages were still of mud and thatch, but new erections of brick and slate were springing up.

I often wonder if we fully appreciate how vast were the changes throughout the whole of Britain during those vital years. Scarcely a corner of the southern part of these islands, at any rate, escaped what was little more than a complete revolution. In many areas a mode of life that had persisted almost without break since the times of the Saxons and other races that had held sway before the coming of the Normans began to break up. In the more rural regions, the passing of the various Inclosure Awards sounded the death-knell of the old open-fields system of agriculture. In other places, like the Lancashire coast, changes were even more sudden. A new industry developed—that of catering for the pleasure seeker. And as the pleasure seekers came from the towns, so was the impact of the townsfolk reflected in a changed outlook of those who for centuries had lived solely on the produce of sea and fields.

In Lytham, the Wheatsheaf Hotel was built in 1794. The site is now occupied by a bank. Two years later the Clifton Arms was

built by John Clifton, of Lytham Hall, on the opposite side of the street. As was only to be expected, new shops were established about the same time.

Just what it was that attracted the first visitors is hard to fathom, for, from all accounts, where now the well-kept green is situated was nothing more than a wild area of sandhills, kept together by the star-grass that since the year 1742 had had the protection of an Act of Parliament. And at one end of it stood Thomas Cookson's windmill.

Beyond that unpretentious open space was a stretch of sand which accommodated the three bathing machines that seem to have been much in demand, not only for their legitimate purpose but also for taking the holiday makers across the fields to St Cuthbert's Church on wet Sundays.

That same gay Lytham had also its sporting appeal. John Clifton was a great lover of the turf, and not only maintained his own stud of horses of true blood but had also laid out a race-course of his own, to which the society folk of Lancashire came along. The things for which Clifton is remembered, however, happened well away from the Lancashire coast. Twice his horses crossed the Pennine to win the greatest flat-racing event in the North, the St Leger at Doncaster. The first was in 1802, when his Fyldener was successful in a race on which, according to the *Sporting Magazine*, over a million pounds was laid; the second was three years later, when his Citizen was the winner. Fyldener lived to the age of twenty-six. Another of Mr Clifton's great horses was his Lizmahago, after which a row of white cottages built near the western end of the Marsh was called.

With such an example before them, it was not long before the neighbouring folk were organising their own race meetings, and the annual Whit Monday event, held over a course which stretched from near the windmill to a lime kiln a mile or so to the east, became a popular item of Lytham's calendar. This was no meeting for horses of true aristocratic blood. Indeed, the bulk of the entries came from the local farms, and doubtless were every bit as accomplished in pulling the plough or doing the hundred and one jobs on the land as in showing their paces at racing speed.

No doubt the races themselves were on similar lines to the first point-to-points, which really lived up to their name, with the riders taking their own line between the starting point and the

turning place near the lime kiln. An old report, however, stresses the fact that the racing was always scrupulously fair, so perhaps the dodge of hiding behind some tall hedge or building and joining the others on the homeward journey, which is said to have been common enough elsewhere, was scorned by the sporting farmers of the Fylde. Possibly, too, the prizes were not sufficiently valuable to encourage such illegitimate aids to victory. They usually consisted of saddles, whips, and the like.

Always, however, sport held second place to the sea. The fortnightly spring tides seem to have heralded the influx of the season's visitors, and horse-drawn vehicles came along from the West Lancashire towns. The week-end habit, too, seemed to be growing, for we are told that people from more distant places would prolong their visits for three or four days.

Lytham, indeed, must have been a happy sort of spot in these times, so much so that the writer of a *Cursory Description of Lytham*, which was published in 1813, was able to tell us:

"The present village of Lytham, previous to its being frequented by bathers, was an obscure place, and from the houses being low and formed of mud and clay covered with straw, gave a stranger more the idea of an Indian town than the appearance of an English village. One circumstance must above all others render Lytham dear to those who have a strict regard to morality—vice has not erected her standard here. The numerous tribes of gamblers, unhappy profligators, and fashionable swindlers find employment and rapine elsewhere. Innocent recreational delights, riding, walking, sailing, and other modes of pastime banish cares from the mind, whilst the salubrity of the air expels disease from the body. Much diversion is found upon the two most excellent Bowling greens on which some part of the company are frequently seen enjoying themselves with a revolving bowl."

Such an enchanting picture of paradise, however, was not painted by every scribe who described the Lytham of a century ago. Another writer, only eight years afterwards, while echoing the sentiments about the salubrious air and of the opportunities for exercise, reminds us that "the lazy will soon tire here," and even offers a word of advice to those sampling his "pleasant and diversified" walks. "You may trip to the Hey-houses and get bad

ale," he reminds us, "Common-side offers a journey, which, if you please, ends at Blackpool."

The impact of the new vogue for seaside visiting on hamlets that had lived an unbroken way of life for centuries must have been startling, and, one can well imagine, not without serious dissensions among the local populations. A census of 1825 shows the families of Lytham almost equally divided in their allegiance to the old occupations of fishing, agriculture, handicrafts, and so on, and others which are listed as "unclassified". One does not need the wisdom of Solomon to guess what many of these "unclassified" occupations were. The almost legendary Lancashire seaside landlady had her birth in such anonymity.

Now, in the 1820s, we hear of some of the older thatched cottages and an inn, the Wheatsheaf, which had served the local folk for years, being pulled down. Then, as now, what was perhaps regarded as picturesque was not always in the interests of sanitation. On the other hand, this was an era in which the past of today had no sentimental appeal and raised no outcry at its destruction. What were called "improved dwellings" appeared near the water's edge. But not yet, if you please, had we reached the age of boarding houses, private hotels, guest houses, and what have you. If you wanted service, you stayed at the Clifton Arms and paid seven shillings a day if you had a private room, a shilling less if you were prepared to eat in the public room. Other hotels, the Commercial and the Ship, were not quite so expensive.

On the other hand, if you wanted entire privacy for yourself and family you resorted to one of these "improved buildings" which were let—lock, stock, and barrel, or, to be more correct, key, furniture, and cooking utensils—for the season. Terms apparently varied according to the number of bedrooms available, each bedroom being assessed at half a guinea a week.

Holiday making at Lytham, however, was not to be the sole prerogative of the more opulent. The cottage folk saw to that. They, too, made it known that they were quite prepared to open their bedrooms to the visitor—at the humble price of four shillings and sixpence for the week!

Such open-handed hospitality could not be refused. No longer was Lytham a place of fashion. Contemporary accounts become less assuring. "Bathers of the working classes," we are now told, "came in shoals during the spring tides from some of the populous

districts of the county, when males and females were seen lining a considerable extent of the shore in promiscuous groups and not embarrassing themselves about appearances." And now, too, we hear of a "house of confinement" being built in Douglas Street to maintain order, and this was provided "with separate rooms for the punishment of males and females". In whatever "promiscuous groups" the visitors might disport themselves about the shore, there was, indeed, proper segregation of the sexes in the "house of confinement!"

By now, of course, Lytham was experiencing some of those growing pains that have been common to the majority of our English coastal resorts. In 1827 a notice in a local paper stated:

"The following are much needed in Lytham—names to the streets, numbers to the houses, lamps for dark evenings, a public clock, a market, livery stables, gigs and horses to be hired by the hour, decent bathing machines, a news-room, and bath carriages to convey folks to church in wet weather."

The writer was, indeed, a man of catholic taste.

Lytham, however, was not to be hurried. The growing pains wore off gradually as the village extended, and, keeping almost perfect step, the number of amenities increased. Among these was a theatre, and travelling companies, typical of those family concerns of the time, played Lytham on their "circuit". One such family was the Lardners, father, mother, son, and daughter, whom a certain Mr Whittle watched perform "Cibber's admirable comedy of a 'Journey to London, or a Bold Push for a Fortune'," and the laughable farce of the "Irish Tutor, or New Lights".

The Lardners, however, did not confine their abilities to the dramatic arts. When not performing, father took "likenesses in miniature at from two to five guineas each", and the son gave lessons in "the polite art of dancing". Yet even such talent, apparently, did not extend to scenery painting, for while our Mr Whittle remarks that the plays "were tolerably got up", he complains that "the scenery was not of that kind which befitted a place of dramatic exhibition".

It was in the 1840s, however, that things really began to happen. Already a railway line had been built across the Fylde from Preston to the Wyre, and now plans were made to build a five-mile long branch line from Lytham and connect with this at

Kirkham. On 16th February, 1846, came the official opening of the line, and the folk of Lytham celebrated in fine style. Flags appeared on public buildings and private residences; Squire Clifton gave a luncheon party at the Hall to the railway directors and the notability of the neighbourhood. After lunch he and his guests entered a gaily decorated train, and to the accompaniment of "a volley of cheers and discharge of cannon" were carried away to do the journey to Kirkham in fifteen minutes.

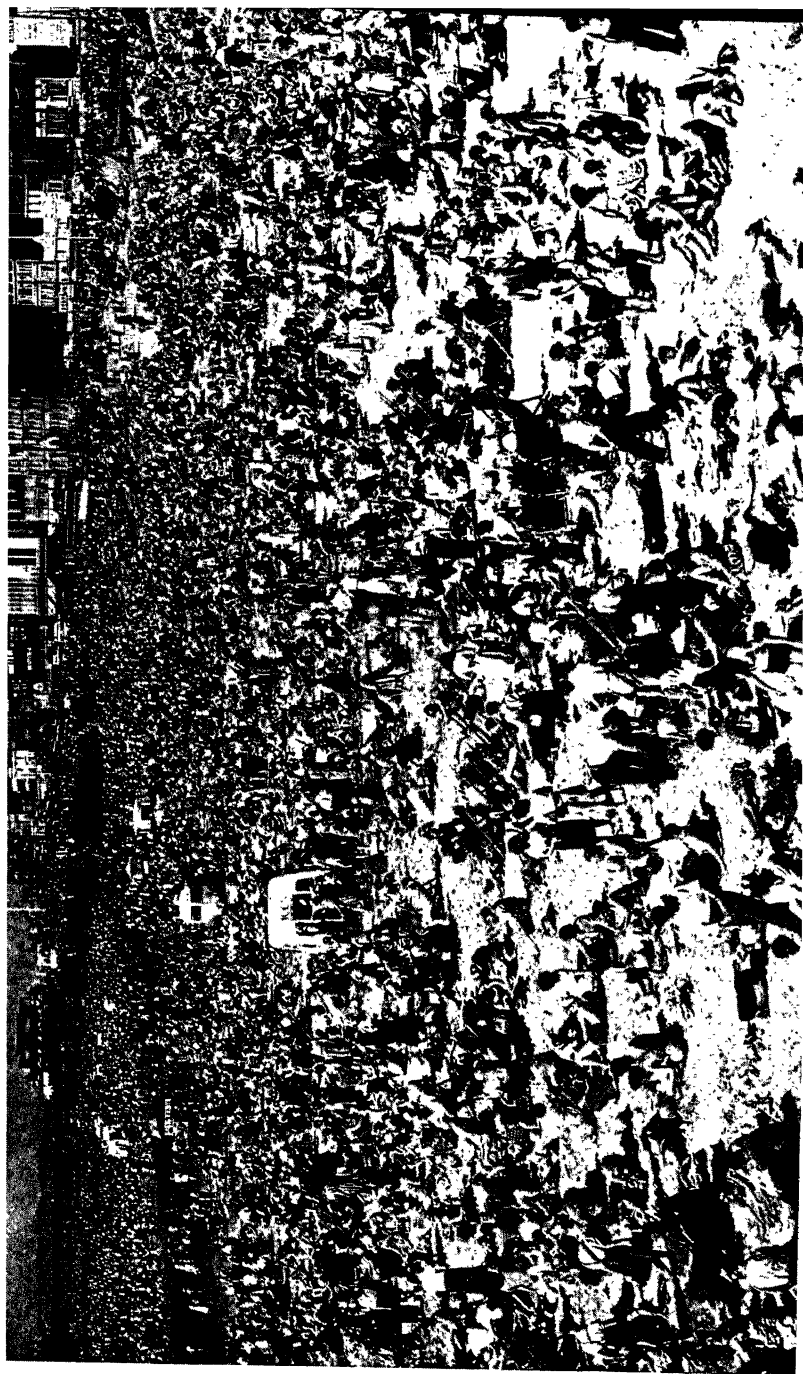
The opening of that railway line marked the end of an era. The old watering place, with its many whimses and humours, began to develop towards the holiday resort we know today. The wished-for market hall came two years later, and in 1872 the public clock on its extended tower, the gift of Lady Eleanor Cecily Clifton. In 1850, too, came the lighting of its streets. Houses were built, and Lytham became a residential place as well as a holiday resort.

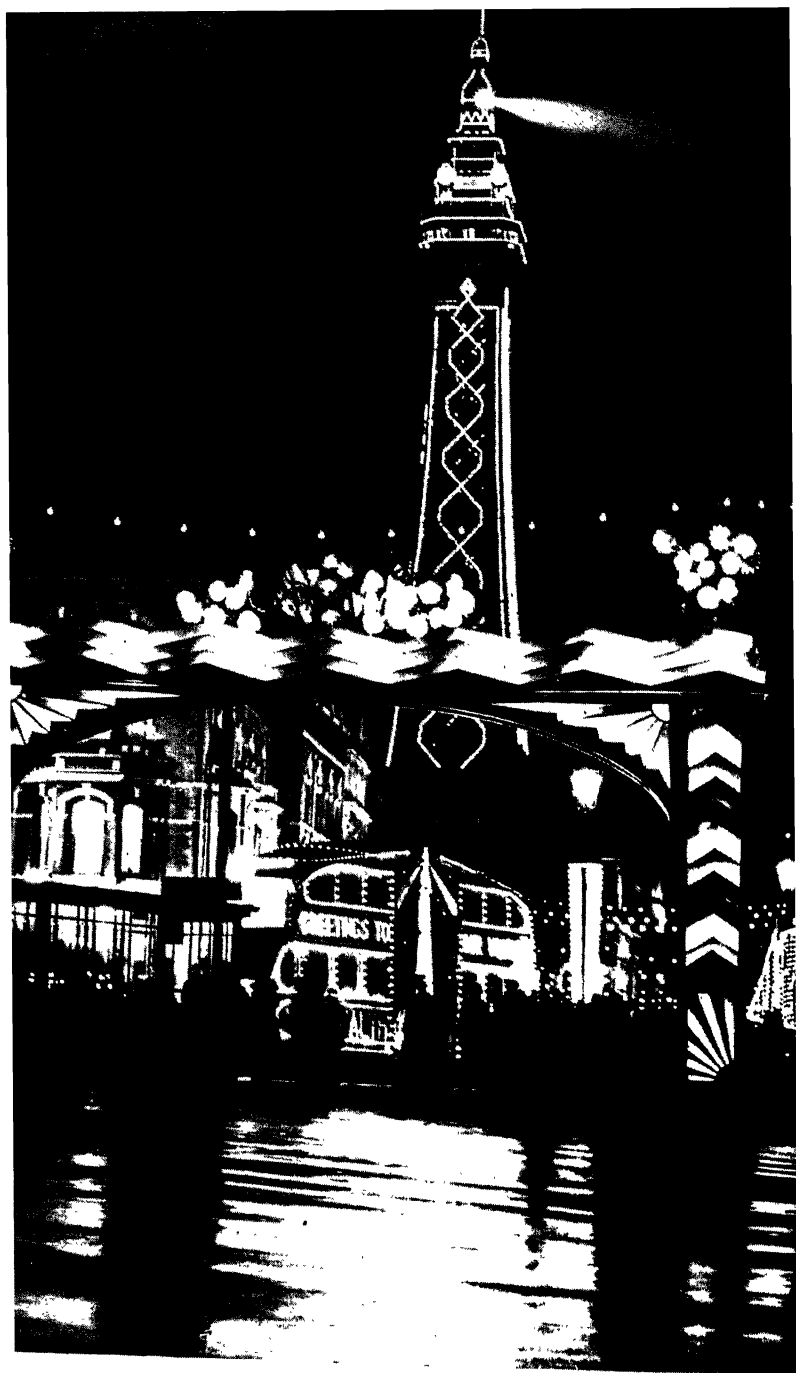
Yet, even so, progress was halted. St Annes was built and, mainly because of its being nearer to the open sea, outpaced its older neighbour. But, more important still, Blackpool grew and thrived, and, extensive though Fylde's seaboard is, it contains room only for one resort of the magnitude of Blackpool.

5

John Porter, who wrote his *History of the Fylde* in August, 1876, referred to St Annes on Sea as an "embryo town", and well he might, for barely eighteen months had elapsed since its first stone had been placed in position. Indeed, his account of the place had, of necessity, to be restricted to one paragraph, which I take the liberty of quoting as being St Annes on Sea's opening phase of history:

The whole of the land of St Annes-on-the-Sea [he writes] was leased to a company of gentlemen for a term of 1,100 years by John Talbot Clifton, esq., and on the 31st of March, 1875, the formality of laying the first stone of the future watering-place was gone through by Master John T. Clifton, the eldest son of T. H. Clifton, esq., M.P. The ceremony was accomplished amidst a large concourse of people, and was in fact the commencement of the handsome and commodious hotel near to the railway station, which has since been completed. The





estate has been judiciously and tastefully arranged by Messrs Maxwell and Tuke, architects, of Bury, and is intersected by broad streets with gentle curves. The houses are intended to be built either singly or in pairs with few exceptions, but in no case will any group comprise more than six; gardens in each instance are to front the dwellings. A promenade, 3,000 feet in length and 180 feet in width, has been formed with asphalt along the marine aspect, and already between twenty and thirty villas have been raised on the sides of the recently made thoroughfares. A public garden with conservatories is also in course of formation, as well as efficient gas-works and other requisites.

From this it is obvious that St Annes is the result of one of the many schemes of the past century to convert a veritable desert of sand into a residential coastal resort, and, unlike the majority, it has met with marked success.

Perhaps St Annes has its ancestral roots delving deeper than one might imagine. Porter mentions that lands at Kilgromel were referred to in the foundation charter of Lytham Priory, and that these were where St Annes now stands. He also refers to an old belief that prior to this a religious settlement here was presided over by the Culdees, priests who came from Ireland and were of the same order as St Columba, the founder of the Celtic monastery on Iona, but suggests the name comes from two British words, *kilgury*, a corner, and *mul*, or *meol*, a sandhill.

Despite this ancient connexion, however, a glance at Speed's map of Lancashire shows that the land on which the resort is situated was under the sea, and today we find that on the coast here we have a piece of land that is somewhat higher in altitude than that immediately behind it. The tides hereabouts have played strange pranks, and, as at Southport on the opposite side of the Ribble estuary, we have a long succession of struggles for supremacy between drifting sands and the sea; a struggle that only concluded when the Ribble was finally dredged and confined to its present course by artificial methods.

Even then there were accumulations of shingle and sand forming banks locally known as "stanners", and in 1846 one of these, which extended between St Annes Point and Lytham, was so high that it was rarely covered by the tides. Loose stones and

gravel from the low cliffs north of Blackpool, and containing granites from Scotland and Cumberland deposited there in the days when glaciers filled what is now the Irish Sea, were washed down the coast by the tides, and being unable to make progress against the swifter running channel of the Ribble were piled up off this point. But the "stanners" seem to have gone when the building of St Annes began.

A distinct advantage of having been entirely built in the last eighty years is that the early planners were never confronted with the problems of changing the old into the new. The work commenced at a time when the pattern of the Lancashire coastal resort was already clear, and from the commencement St Annes set out to cater for the residential section of the public as well as the holiday maker.

Growth, indeed, has never accelerated beyond the dictates of good planning. One senses that when walking along the curved main street and along the wide avenues that lead from it on either side. The whole seems cunningly arranged so as to catch the sun and keep the prevailing south-westerly winds at bay.

To me one of the most astonishing features of St Annes is the way in which the desert can be made to bring forth its fruits and flowers. Go into the Ashton Gardens, presented to the town by the late Lord Ashton so recently as 1914, and see how well this has been done.

St Annes, I readily admit, is artificial. Yet the fact remains that the planners have succeeded in making a town to their liking. There is no sense of incongruity; no jarring note between the old and mellow and the new. St Annes is as the planners intended it to be—at the moment.

I add that final phrase with a feeling that the future is not quite so certain. Hitherto, a good proportion of the residents were retired folk. Now changed economic conditions are making their presence felt. To retire to the seaside after a life spent in business or industry may still be the ideal of many folk, but achievement is more difficult. A couple of decades ago some capital could be spent in buying a house, and interest on the rest and a pension—either state or private—enabled life to be lived in comfort, if not luxury. Today, few can retire in such a fashion with contented minds. One hesitates to invest capital in property, knowing full well that unless there is a rapid fall in the cost of living it will be needed for

other things. St Annes—as well as other similar places—is beginning to feel the changed conditions. “House for sale” notices remain in position for weeks and sometimes months on end. The older generation, that which has built up St Annes, is passing, and its place is becoming increasingly more difficult to fill.

What then does the future hold? St Annes may easily become, as it has shown signs of doing in recent years, a dormitory for Manchester and other Lancashire towns and cities. Outwardly that would bring little change; inwardly, the change would be more marked. Only at weekends and in summer evenings would its inhabitants really belong to the place. In winter they would see so little of it that their ties would be no greater than those of any town or city suburb.

Yet the change need be no more than transitory. In course of time a new “retired” community would have settled there; folks who have lived there for some time, yet had never really belonged to it before.

There is, of course, the holiday resort side. Here, again, there is the “dormitory” angle, and it must be admitted that there have been signs of St Annes becoming a kind of annexe to Blackpool, catering for those who like the rounds of theatres and pleasure-land, yet prefer to leave the gaieties of the liveliest coastal resort in Britain to sleep.

St Annes has, to its everlasting credit, never tried to compete with its greater neighbour. It has provided sufficient in the way of entertainment and amenity to maintain its own clientele, and in so doing secured its proper niche in the scheme of things.

6

We are, of course, fast approaching Blackpool, and yet, even in an area where catering for the holiday maker predominates over all else, we cannot quite escape from agriculture and the growing of crops. And, like so much else hereabouts, it is a form of crop-growing that has been influenced by changing dictates of fancy.

Travel from St Annes to Blackpool on the road that keeps inland from the coast and one cannot but notice that glasshouses are everywhere. Indeed, this is one of the most intensive glasshouse crop-growing regions in the whole of the country. Much of this area was once covered by the original “black pool”, from which

the famous seaside resort takes its name. The pool disappeared long ago, but it has left as its aftermath a rich black soil primarily suited for horticultural activities. Add to that soil a virtually fog-free area, a good light, and a prevailing wind that comes from the west, and you have the essential ingredients for intensive cultivation of this type.

Despite the fact that today over 250 of the 1,000-odd members of the horticultural section of the Lancashire Farmers' Union are engaged in this area, the development of glasshouse cultivation is really a product of the last half-century or so. Formerly this was a great strawberry-growing area, and it was fortunate for those engaged in horticulture hereabouts that the time when virus diseases brought about the failure of the strawberry crops coincided with an increasing taste for the tomato, so that the change-over was accomplished without any financial disaster to the growers.

One of the families which has been engaged in market gardening in this area for over a century is the Barrow family of Marton Moss, and Mr W. Barrow, who now manages the firm of Messrs J. Barrow and Son, at Welwyn Nursery, represents the fourth generation which has cultivated the mosses. The present establishment was set up in 1920 by his father, Mr J. Barrow, who, although leaving much of the organisation to his son, still maintains a lively interest in all that goes on.

This nursery, which is typical of those in the Fylde, consists of about two acres, of which half an acre is devoted to glasshouses of the aeroplane type. All the glasshouses are heated, with the exception of one lean-to, and the indoor cultivation is almost entirely concerned with the production of lettuce, tomato, and chrysanthemum crops, which follow one another in rapid succession. Cucumbers, however, are grown in one house—the propagating house—during the spring and early summer.

Work on the first crop of the year, the lettuce, commences in the autumn. By October the propagating house is cleared of its cucumbers, and the soil is steamed under high pressure to sterilise it completely. The lettuce is then sown at a temperature of 55°.

Meanwhile, the remaining glasshouses have been concerned with chrysanthemums, and as these are cleared off towards the middle of November, with the exception of some late flowering strains which are maintained chiefly for Christmas decorations,

the soil is got ready for the main lettuce crop. The change-over takes anything up to three weeks, and in that time stable manure is added to the soil, the whole is flooded and steamed, and sulphate of potash and phosphates added.

After the lettuce has been planted out, heat is applied, and this is continued until late February or early March, when the plants are ready for cutting. The final spell in cold glasshouses hardens the plants and enables them to be sent away to the markets looking crisp and fresh.

Meanwhile, the propagating house has been devoted to the rearing of the young tomato plants, and just as there is a change-over from chrysanthemums to lettuce in the autumn, so is the spring the time for the next change in cropping. Once more, some soil preparation is necessary. A further dressing with sulphate of potash will be followed by hand-digging of the soil. For tomato growing, seed boxes have been discarded in favour of the modern method of using the standard-size soil blocks. Brown loam, which has been steamed previously, forms the basis of these and is worked into a compost with peat, coarse sand, and fertiliser. The blocks are made by a machine.

The tomato crop occupies most of the glasshouses until September, and then the chrysanthemums take over. Here, at the Welwyn Nursery, some 10,000 early outdoor varieties, 10,000 mid-season, and 1,600 late chrysanthemums are grown.

Following such a strict rotation means, of course, that each crop must be cleared for the next one to take its place at the scheduled time, so that it is imperative that there should be adequate markets for the disposal of produce. Local shops take up a good proportion, about two-thirds, of the tomato and chrysanthemum crops, but the lettuce, which is ready too early for the Blackpool holiday season, goes farther afield, mainly to the towns of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and even to the Birmingham area in the Midlands.

Glasshouse cultivation is not, of course, the only branch of horticulture carried on at these Fylde coastal nurseries. Outdoors, an early cauliflower crop, from seed sown in the autumn and wintered under glass, is planted out as soon as the weather is sufficiently open. This is usually followed by curly lettuce planted out in July and cropped in the autumn. The majority of nurseries, too, grow early chrysanthemums out of doors, the

HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

plants being afforded protection by the local "pit light" form of glass covers.

The holiday visitor to the Fylde coast may see the glasshouses as he passes along the roads leading in and out of Blackpool. Only those who have visited one or other of the nurseries realise how important is this horticultural activity to the district.

CHAPTER III

BLACKPOOL AND FLEETWOOD

I

NOT even London itself can boast a more familiar skyline than Blackpool. Millions of folk know it through intimate acquaintance; thousands more know it through the medium of the photographs in railway carriages and in the national newspapers, and through posters displayed on hoardings throughout the length and breadth of the land. There are those who scoff at it, but more regard it with an affection that is only understandable to those who know it well.

Its crowning glory is, of course, its Tower; that great Eiffel Tower-like construction that rises above the promenade, the houses of entertainment, the boarding establishments and hotels, in fact, above the ever-growing town that is Blackpool itself. It would be no exaggeration to say that it is the most noted building in the whole of the North of England.

Those living in the valleys at the foot of the Pennine hills like to claim that Blackpool Tower can be seen from some nearby summit on a clear day. Indeed, the very thrill of looking across Lancashire's wide acres to find that needle-like structure far away to the west compels many folk to climb who would otherwise remain in the valleys. There, on fine Sunday afternoons when the chimneys, which during the week endeavour to blot out the vision if not the memory, cease smoking for a while, and men, women, and children seek it out with naked eye or a pair of field-glasses and recall past holidays beside the Irish Sea or, more often, count the weeks to when their next annual holiday will begin. I've done that kind of thing myself and will, I admit quite unashamedly, do it scores of times again. Blackpool is that kind of place.

Even on the Lakeland summits, with so much natural beauty around, I have seen walkers and climbers, bronzed, fit, and the very personification of energetic youth, pause and point out the dwarfed man-made aiguille far away to the south-west. Doubtless

they, with that fine sense of superiority that comes when some peak has been climbed, feel vastly aloof from Blackpool's teeming masses. But even they, if they are honest, cannot deny the magnetism of the place.

From afar that Tower is, indeed, Blackpool. In the town itself, it fits more properly into the scheme of things, but even then for the first day or two after arriving at the holiday resort men and women tend to get stiff necks through constant gazing up at its top-most pinnacle. Then, they too, fit into the mosaic that makes up holiday Blackpool.

And what a mosaic it is. To see it properly one should go into the Tower itself, not to the very top, perhaps, but sufficiently high to look down on the promenade, and especially on the teeming masses which surge along it. If you have chosen the right time—the Glasgow holiday weekend in September, or the “Wakes” week of one of the big Lancashire cotton towns—you will see something that cannot be equalled elsewhere.

Ten, fifteen deep, these folk seemingly roll along the promenade, the rolling effect emphasised by the fact that not all are going the same way; and from time to time a series of great waves overflow from the wide pavements on to the carriage-way. Somehow, the tram-cars, themselves open and shaped like boats, manage to keep going. It all looks very confusing and bewildering. Yet, truth to tell, there is little real confusion. Only a gay, good-humoured throng, enjoying itself as only a Lancashire crowd can do—in mass. Laughter, conversation, the clanging of tram bells, intermingle, and the sound, a gay sort of sound, too, comes up.

There are, of course, those who find no joy in crowds of this kind, but such folk wisely stay away from Blackpool. In their wisdom they retain their own serenity; Blackpool suffers not at all. And only by staying away do these people escape that magnetism which draws every one, sooner or later, into that cheerful mass.

I have referred to the “Wakes” weeks of the Lancashire cotton towns. The word may seem strange to alien—and by that, I am afraid, I really mean southern—ears. It may even be misconstrued as one of those Irish festivals connected with the honouring of the dead! In Lancashire it simply means a holiday.

Throughout the all-too-short summer months each town has

its own "Wakes", when every factory closes and the whole place is on holiday. These "Wakes" are staggered, and the dates are kept every bit as religiously as any event in the calendar. The Blackpool landladies know that one week they will have their usual consignment from Oldham, the next their party will consist of folk from Rochdale, another week it will be the turn of the people from Blackburn, and so on through the long list of Lancashire towns, great and small. And the same people come along year after year. But visit any one of those towns when its "Wakes" holiday is on and it will seem a place of the dead. Perhaps after all there is a closer link than at first seemed apparent between this and the Irish interpretation of the word. The folk who keep those now gaunt-looking factories working and, in reality, are mainly responsible for those belchings of smoke that obscure the sight of Blackpool Tower from the nearby hill are gone—the majority of them to within a mile or two of the Tower itself.

It has been claimed that the whole idea has really a religious significance, and that it originated in the days when rushes, gathered from the nearby streams and ponds, were strewn on the earthen floors of the local churches. The rushes were mainly gathered in the summer months, and the whole village commemorated the occasion with a holiday, or, to be more correct, a Holy Day. If this be true—and I see no reason to doubt it—then it has survived all the upheavals of later times, and, although long since divorced from its early function, is as honourable in its antiquity as it is an important part of Lancashire life.

We find its counterpart on the eastern side of the Pennine, but the name "Wakes" is not used. There we hear of Holmfirth "feast", Longwood "thump", Almondbury "rush"—surely a link there with rush-bearing—and so on. The more refined speak of "textile holidays", but the old names yet linger. The Blackpool landlady knows when the next "feast" or "thump" is coming off, and calls it such. For although Yorkshire can distribute its favours between its own and the Lancashire coasts, Blackpool has always taken a fair share of the spoils.

There is, perhaps, some difference between the holiday outlook of the two counties. And it has nothing to do with any form of snobbery. It is based on something much deeper than that. It has been said—and I think well said—that the Lancashire man saves to spend, the Yorkshireman saves for the sheer pleasure of saving.

ve to spend part of a holiday in this fashion, but I am
 : that they have not a very definite place in the scheme
 ll around are folk of the same town. Notes are com-
 vs are discussed. Everyone is certain to have seen some-
 hbour in the queue knows. And when the seat for the
 journey has been secured, the holiday continues. The
 at the mills and factories have again appeared on the
 zon heightens the zest for enjoyment of the remaining

perhaps, proceeding a little too fast. There is still that
 Blackpool to be considered. Rationing or not, those
 s seem to me to be very much overcrowded. They go
 intermediate stations. Standing on one of the plat-
 t Preston, one watches the holiday train go through.
 mood for a good time is rising rapidly. Shirt-sleeves
 d collars and ties are the first indication. The amazing
 t the majority of carriage windows are closed tight.
 any Lancashire folk have a rooted objection to open
 relic, doubtless, of the days when their ancestors
 tivities of the notorious witches. There is even some-
 lition behind the closed window.

ey comes to an end at one of Blackpool's two major
 before that there will have been innumerable squeals
 particularly from the younger occupants of the
 hen the Tower was first sighted. If the terminus is the
 n, one emerges into a street some distance from the
 Central, then one is in the very midst of pleasureland,
 ven catch a glimpse of the sea, rolling and heaving
 yards across the promenade.

loors open. Jackets, collars, and ties are hastily donned
 k "emptying out" would best describe what happens
 n beings, cases, buckets and spades, seem to come
 n that train. Somehow things get sorted out again. I
 just how. Youngsters want to dash off to the sea
 ; parents counsel patience. Probably the holiday com-
 t discordant note when juvenile eagerness and adult
 use have the first sharp clash.

ut for taxis, others form queues for buses and trams.
 rney is to the "lodgings" or the "digs", which will
 me for the next few days. Probably the last "Wakes"

That, I think, just about crystallises the difference between

One "Wakes" week over—or perhaps it should be fortnight in these modern times, although the phrase has to fit—the Lancashire family begins to think of the next. practical turn to that thinking. Every organisation and it has its "club", to which the members contribute part of their weekly pay packets, with the very plausibility of going "on the bust" at least once a year. An preliminary to the actual holiday is the drawing-out of that have heard it said—but cannot vouch for the truth of when the day comes for the journey to the seaside, a wife will extract the next week's rent and put it safely the return. Apart from that, the money is there to spend.

The moralist may not agree with all this, and call it gaudy. But if the moralist had to work for fifty weeks on in a Lancashire cotton factory, with the looms clatter clattering alongside and wheels whirring all around, he would be so sure of himself. I have never worked in a cotton factory probably never will, but I have seen sufficient of those who give them a deal of respect. I see them regularly on holiday. And I know they have deserved to the full the very last that obvious enjoyment they extract from their change from din and clatter of machinery to the less jarring noise of tongue and even canned music.

The Yorkshireman has his "clubs", too, but not quite on the same scale. They fit in more with the general idea of saving. A sufficient is generally drawn out to ensure a good time and the feeling of being too lavish about it all.

There is more than this drawing-out of club money to the holiday can get under way. When the greater proportion of a town's population shifts itself *en masse* to Blackpool there is bound to be some strain on transport. Today, thousands go by the railway still has a great pull. Special coaches and trains run. Seats are booked ahead. There is even a form of railway accommodation. One finds out which train to take and travel by some time before the holiday commences.

Rationing, too, comes into being for the return journey. Probably at least a few hours of one morning will be taken up standing in a long queue waiting to hear of the homeward journey. I have seen many of those queues. At first, it

holiday makers will not have left. Their cases and trunks will be piled at the door. Old acquaintances are recognised, and a year's gap is bridged in a few minutes. It would be interesting to know how many families meet each other in that brief interval between the coming of one and the departure of another, year after year. If you would realise the full significance of this, walk along Albert Road or Adelaide Street at Christmas and see the magnificent display of greeting cards each house possesses. The Blackpool landlady is a person with a place in the circle of friends at numerous Lancashire homes.

Not only do the "Wakes" holidays bring the crowded trains coming into Blackpool's stations. There are just as many coming on day excursions from all parts of the North. Works' parties, sporting clubs, religious bodies, in fact, organisations representative of every phase of activity, think of Blackpool when they plan their annual "day's out". It is commonplace for 300 and more trains to arrive at Blackpool in one day during the height of the holiday season.

Again we have the same crowded carriages, but, of course, luggage is absent. And, often enough, paper hats are donned the minute the home station is left. With only a few hours to spend beside the sea, the Blackpool terminus is soon left behind. The day trippers are lost in Blackpool's thousands.

I have written chiefly of the rush from the Lancashire towns, but September brings a Scottish invasion. The Glasgow autumn holiday weekend sends the coaches coming down from Shap Fells in great streams. One wonders how Blackpool accommodates them all. I am told that it doesn't, at least not technically so, and that hundreds sleep out on the sands or on benches along the promenade!

But the important thing about it all is that it was only so recently as in the year 1846 that the first railway engine came steaming into Blackpool.

2

Wherein lies the magnetism of Blackpool? Primarily, I think, in the means to cater for the holiday maker in mass and to fill in every available moment of his time.

It has set out to do this from the days when it first began to develop as a holiday resort, and the amazing thing about it is that

it is the places that were built in the two closing decades of the last century that still constitute some of its major attractions. Blackpool may seem the very last place in England to be dubbed with the epithet "Victorian", yet such is the real truth, at least so far as the centre—and most populous part—is concerned. Later years have added the Pleasure Beach at the south, a whole mass of streets and houses stretching along the coast almost to Fleetwood in the north, and as lovely a park as you can find in the land at the back, but the real heart of it all is Victorian!

It was, in fact, the great Paris Exhibition of 1889 that inspired its Tower. Local history fails to record the name of the man who first conceived the idea of building something similar to the Eiffel Tower at Blackpool, but some say he was a Londoner! Certain it is that he had the support of both local, including Alderman John Bickerstaffe who was first chairman of the company, and London men by the time the foundation stone was placed in position in 1891. It needed not only inspiration but courage to contemplate such an enterprise in what was still a resort in its infancy, relying for its patronage on families whose weekly income was little more than a pound or two a week. Remind me, if you must, that the value of the pound was greater than it is today, but you cannot escape the fact that much capital was locked in the venture, and that it would be some time before any worthwhile returns would be forthcoming. It might have been that this fact was overlooked by some of those concerned. It is said that some of the London debenture-holders were soon asking for their money to be returned. The local members of the syndicate responsible for the scheme met this blow by advancing some more of their own. Their faith was rewarded. The Tower prospered. And it has never looked back.

That great tower of steel and cast iron, rising to a height of over 500 feet—518 feet 9 inches, the official handbook says—and ascended by means of lifts, is therefore a Victorian erection. The Zoo, where feeding time at three in the afternoon is ever an attraction, is a survival of the old Victorian menagerie. The great ballroom, where over 2,000 dancers can—and do—take the floor in one evening and double that number sit around and watch, is Victorian in the ornateness of its carvings and colouring schemes. So is the nearby restaurant, and the licensed bars with accommodation for 2,000 customers. Yet, the turnstiles register anything up to 60,000 folk passing inside in a day at the height of the season.

If you have never thought of the Victorians as enterprising before, then it is because you have never been to Blackpool Tower. And if you are financially minded, I would remind you that £1 shares cost more than seven times that amount—and you would be lucky to get any.

Old prints and photographs of Blackpool show a big wheel, rivalling the Tower as a component part of the skyline. That was part of the Winter Gardens, and our fathers and mothers enjoyed the great sensation of being slowly moved in circular fashion in carriages slung from the outer rim. Sometimes that wheel stuck when the mechanism went wrong. As a youngster one heard of exciting stories of passengers being marooned thus for many hours. Somehow, one always wanted the trip on Blackpool's big wheel for the last morning of the holiday, when there was a fleeting hope of missing the homeward train. But the wheel was pulled down in the years between the two wars. In a town with such a surfeit of riches, no one seems to have really regretted its passing. Most of the younger generation know it only as part of an old photograph or print.

It was at the Winter Gardens, too, that the late William Holland, manager in the closing years of the last century, displayed a rare sense of opulence by buying a most expensive carpet for one of the bar parlours. Some of his friends could not countenance such extravagance. They told him that the folk that patronised the Winter Gardens would be inclined to use it as a spittoon. The very suggestion gave Holland an idea. Within a day or two, posters were displayed around the town inviting all and sundry to: "Come to the Winter Gardens and spit on Bill Holland's hundred-guinea carpet!"

Stretching south from the Tower along the promenade is the Golden Mile, golden because it is the richest place in England for the owners of the amusement arcades. Again we have the influence of the Victorian period, when no one dreamed of erecting the sort of skyscraper that lines so many sea fronts today. But that squat line of buildings is as rich as any in the world. It is the place of the sideshow, the penny-in-the-slot machine, the shooting gallery, and so on. To rent a site here costs a mint of money. Even that would be small compared with the income forthcoming provided you mounted the right sort of show. It is said that the man who persuaded the ex-rector of Stiffkey to sit in a tub here for a

summer made enough in a few months to have kept both him and the former ecclesiastic handsomely for the rest of their lives.

Here, too, are all those various machines where by putting a coin in a slot you can set in motion mechanism that will enable you to pry into the private, and often unsavoury, lives of a whole host of different characters. Again a Victorian form of amusement, and one that appeals almost as much today. The penny-in-the-slot machine has had a totally different, but important, repercussion on Blackpool. Little more than twenty years ago, four brothers named Hawtin came from industrially depressed Coventry to the Lancashire seaside resort and commenced making these very machines. From that has sprung up a light engineering works that provides a deal of employment for the people of the town, and contributes to a modern industry that prevents Blackpool from being entirely dependent on its holiday trade. A sideline is the making of junk-boxes which help to assist our overseas trade by going, of all places, to America's Coney Island!

How long this happy relic of the Victorian age will remain on the promenade is not known. There is talk of an improvement scheme that will dispense with many of the present rude shacks and bizarre hutments. One cannot help the feeling that there is a danger of something that is vital, something that is Blackpool at heart, going too.

Still farther south is the Pleasure Beach, and that, at least, is modern. Not so long ago one walked on sleepers stretched across the sand that became wet and horribly sticky after rain. Now it is a case of concrete everywhere. A general impression is one of whiteness, not the sepulchral whiteness of an Eastern city, although there are domes and spires enough (without the smells) to remind one of Baghdad, Karachi, or other places of the fabulous Orient, but a scintillating whiteness that catches the strong light of a sunny summer day, and even manages to conjure something of cheerfulness out of a wet one in August. There are futuristic white buildings housing a whole host of entertainments; there are great white masses of metal giving all the thrills of the Big Dipper, the Grand National, and so on; the coolness of the interior of the Ice Dome is reflected in its white façade; even the various attendants at the minor stalls wear white coats when on duty.

It is a noisy place this Pleasure Beach, noisy with the whirl and

rush of so many exciting things and the screams and yells of those who patronise them. It is also a singularly happy one.

All this whiteness seems transcended into something more soft and shimmering, as a myriad coloured lights twinkle from every dome and tower, and festoon themselves like long rows of gaily coloured beads overhead when the autumn illuminations commence in late September.

A discerning local authority realised that as Blackpool's population grew, so must the holiday season be extended, if at all possible, to cover the whole of the twelve-month. That considerable success has come its way is evident from the fact that the place now has a resident population of 150,000. True, some of these find employment in the various light industries recently developed on the outskirts of the town, but the greater proportion is either directly concerned with catering for the visitors or associated with one or other of the ancillary trades.

The autumn illuminations do much to extend the season towards Christmas. Even before the First World War there had been coloured lights strewn along the promenade during the weeks of late summer, but in 1925 a much bigger scheme was successfully launched. The illuminations were advertised far and wide. And from far and wide people flocked to see the spectacle of their favourite seaside resort strewn with coloured lights from end to end. Some came for an evening, travelling home long after midnight had passed and even Blackpool had turned to rest.

Next year, the illuminations were cancelled on account of the prevailing coal strike, but the next autumn they were resumed and, with the exception of the last war years, they have been held ever since. The season was at first one of a month, then it became one of five weeks, now it extends to six and, with true Blackpool enterprise, covers seven weekends.

Hotel and boarding-house proprietors enter into the scheme and have their own private illuminations. The Tower, the three piers, the various halls of entertainment are a blaze of colour outside. The lifts carrying passengers to the top of the Tower work ceaselessly to deal with the long queues of those eager for a panoramic view of the whole. Some prefer higher altitudes. There are aircraft at the Squires Gate airport ready to satisfy their needs.

I am told that the Corporation alone possesses some 300,000 coloured bulbs, and the whole of its equipment of tableaux,





cables, apparatus and the like is insured for nearly £400,000. A permanent staff of nearly eighty folk is employed for erecting, repairing, repainting, and so on throughout the year. A costly business perhaps, but one that pays handsome dividends. Blackpool puts on the greatest show of its kind in the land. Folks know it, too. The big crowds provide the evidence.

True, there is something of a lull when the lights are switched off in October, a lull that provides a welcome breather for those most intimately concerned with looking after the holiday crowds. Yet there is no sudden cessation of activity. The theatres carry on; there are festivals of music and dancing—and every weekend crowds come from all parts of North Lancashire to watch Blackpool's team of footballers.

Like so much else in Blackpool, the rise of its Association football team has been little short of meteoric. I remember them as a boy, when they played in the Second Division—there was no Third Division in those days or doubtless their career would have started there. My home-town team, superiors of the First Division, came along to play an exhibition game. If memory serves me aright, it was the seashiders who gave the exhibition, and I returned to the boarding house to receive the butts of all and sundry, and with a secret grudge against those who had humbled the mighty.

Now, of course, it is Blackpool who are in the First Division, and who have risen to the heights. I was there when Harry Johnson, Stanley Matthews, and the rest of them came back from Wembley with the F.A. Cup, and Matthews his first Cup-winner's medal. The roar from the crowds that lined the streets was Blackpool's own welcome. Hitherto, the Blackpool crowds I had known had been mainly composed of holiday makers. This was a domestic affair, one in which I, the stranger, had no real part. Strange to say, I cannot think of any other leading holiday resort where I could have watched such a sight. But Blackpool knows the value of a good football team, not only for the benefit of those 150,000 folk who live there, but in bringing in people from the nearby areas.

Christmas and New Year bring the visitors along again. Blackpool induces the stars of theatreland to take part in its pantomimes. Its circus opens for a short season. And, always, of course, there are the animals to be fed in the Tower Zoo.

Only a few weeks remain between the New Year and Easter,

weeks of intense activity. There is painting, and repairing, and planning to be done. The Publicity Manager is proud of the fact that he gets out his season's guide for 1st January. That means letters requesting accommodation soon begin to arrive. Already next season's routine is being arranged. Already there is an inkling of those annual re-unions in the luggage-piled halls ahead.

Behind all this activity we have that almost fabulous figure—the Blackpool landlady. She has been burlesqued in stage and radio play, caricatured by music hall and concert comedian. She takes the travesties of her real self in good part. A broad sense of humour usually covers a strictly utilitarian role and rare measure of business acumen. There are nearly 5,000 of these landladies—almost a fifth of the entire country's total—in Blackpool alone, and from time to time they gather in one of the big halls of the town, at a period when the visitors are at home, to listen to lectures and watch demonstrations on how to improve an art which one might be pardoned for thinking they had already brought to perfection—that of catering for Blackpool's great and transitory summer population.

Nor are they ashamed to make their tariffs known to the world. Here, in this mid-twentieth century, one can still get bed and breakfast for as little as 7s. 6d., and even "full board" at 12s. 6d. The irony of it all was that when Blackpool housed the Royal Agricultural Society of England's annual show in 1953, the bigger hotels were fully booked for weeks ahead, and many stayed in places several miles away. Yet I saw cards bearing the word "Vacancies" at many of the boarding houses. There was an impression that the accommodation offered was too cheap to be good. Blackpool has long been noted for its skill in advertising and convincing propaganda, but it seemed to have failed to convince the outer world of the excellence of its accommodation at prices known to Lancashire folk for many years.

An old guide to Lancashire says of Blackpool:

"The accommodation provided at the large and commodious hotels, the handsome furnished cottages, and the comfortable and highly respectable boarding and lodging houses, is excellent and suitable for the reception of the various classes of visitors who resort hither during the bathing season."

That was written in 1866. It is just as true today.

1866. Just twenty years after the arrival of the first railway train. And a hundred years previously Edward Whiteside, who (like William Sutton, of Southport) is usually regarded as mainly responsible for the things that followed, had just commenced accommodating visitors at a little plaster cottage in the middle of fields off what is now the North Shore. Mrs Whiteside, a Welsh girl with more than ordinary skill in the art of cooking, was thus the forerunner of the fabulous race of Blackpool landladies!

We can go back another hundred years, for records of that time indicate that Blackpool was just a collection of fishermen's huts built on the edge of the peaty morass which gave the place its name. Near by was Fox Hall, long a residence of the noted Lancashire family of Tyldesley, successive generations of which hunted over the countryside, got well and truly mixed up with local political squabbles and even major insurrections (and, as usual in the case of these Lancashire families, showed an uncanny knack of supporting the wrong or, to be more correct, the losing side), and, withal, remained highly respected squires. The final act of misfortune was when Edward Tyldesley took up arms with the Jacobites in the 1715 rebellion. Although he escaped the punishment that was meted out to so many of his fellow insurgents, from that time onwards the prosperity of the Tyldesley family began to decline, and very soon afterwards we hear that the estate at Fox Hall had passed out of their hands.

The Tyldesleys, not unnaturally, made their own unwitting contribution to the development of what was to become so popular a resort. At Fox Hall they entertained many of the county families of their period. They were mainly responsible for the institution of an annual race meeting held at Layton, immediately north-east of the centre of the present town, and then, of course, predominantly rural. The Tyldesleys also contributed to the other industry of the Fylde, that of farming. Entries in Thomas Tyldesley's diary, such as "very busy all morning in my hay", and "busy transplanting cauliflower and cabbage plants", show how deeply rooted were his rural interests.

The coming of the Georgian period saw the first signs of that

flocking of people to the seaside, and it was quite natural that many from Lancashire should come to a place already well known in the social life of the county.

It was these folk, the forerunners of the annual Wakes visitors, that Edward Whiteside set out to accommodate in his cottage. Before long, the excellence of the fare provided was such that a regular clientele had been built up. Whiteside extended his premises; he engaged a party of strolling players to entertain his visitors, and he built a road from the shore to his home. By now, the well-to-do as well as the more humble folk were among his clients.

The success of one man is, of course, always the signal for others to follow suit. Some of those who came to partake of Whiteside's hospitality themselves settled in the area and bought land in order to set up similar houses "for refreshment and entertainment". The list of entertainments provided varied from dancing bears to performing love birds!

Whiteside, the former labourer in the fields, made a fortune as the result of his enterprise, the first man to wax rich through provision for Blackpool's holiday makers, and his cottage, now no longer recognisable as such, was sold. It passed into the hands of an aboriginal named Tom the Cobbler, who took out a licence and turned the place into an inn. Porter, the Fylde historian, speaks of the change thus:

"Those who had been accustomed to the scrupulous care and cleanliness of Whiteside and his thrifty wife must have experienced a considerable shock from the eccentricities of the new proprietor; each day at the dinner hour he entered in working costume amongst the assembled guests, and with grimy fingers produced from the depths of his well-rosined apron the allotted portion of bread for each. How this peculiarity was appreciated by his visitors there are no means of ascertaining, but as his dwelling did not develop in the course of years into a modern and commodious hotel, like the other licensed houses which sprang up about that time and a little later, we are inclined to fear that some internal mismanagement caused its collapse."

But doubtless we have there the first Uncle Tom's Cabin of Blackpool's North Shore; and successive hotels, altered beyond

all conceivable recognition, have carried on the name but not, of course, the tradition.

The Blackpool hoteliers of the second half of the eighteenth century were, without doubt, of an original turn of mind. The Gynn, which then stood near the "apex of a deep and wide fissure in the cliffs", was presided over by another quaint character who, according to Porter, was wont to make the final reckoning on the mounting block outside the door, with an adjunct to his departing guests to "remember the servants". Once, in 1833, when a fierce storm resulted in the loss of eleven ships off the Fylde coast, the only survivor, a Scottish sloop, was saved by someone placing a lighted candle in the window of the Gynn, a light which guided the vessel through the channel between the sandbanks.

By 1788 Blackpool had grown into a hamlet of some fifty houses, and in that year one Dr William Hutton published its first "guide book", a modest—in size if not in claims—affair entitled *A Description of Blackpool in Lancashire, Frequented for Sea Bathing*. Of those fifty houses,

"about six [he wrote] make a figure, fronting the sea with an aspect exactly west, and are appropriated for the reception of company; the others are the dwellings of the inhabitants, which chiefly form the background. In some of these lodged the inferior class, whose sole motive for visiting this airy region is health."

Hutton gives a fascinating insight into the charges of his time.

Apparently the highest was 3s. 6d. a day, "exclusive of liquors"; at some you could stay for half-a-crown a day, but here you had to provide your own "tea, coffee, sugar, and liquors", and if you wanted you could be accommodated for as little as 1s. 6d. a day. But there was no guarantee of a good night's rest, for Hutton complained that "disturbance reigns at midnight". In fact, he suggested that boarding-house proprietors should be empowered to levy a fine of one shilling upon "any person vociferous after twelve", and that the money should go towards the improvement of the parade!

This parade was, apparently, on the edge of the sea beach, an affair "capable of being made one of the most beautiful walks in the island". In fact, Hutton becomes mildly prophetic when he tells us that "it might easily be extended a mile in a straight line".

Today, Blackpool can boast a promenade almost seven miles long—6.98 miles, I am given to understand, is the official figure!

Not only midnight tipplers, however, were to be fined to provide the money for the scheme. Hutton also suggested a penalty of a shilling levied on any person seated at table before dinner, and, much milder, "that every visitor at his arrival shall enter his name in a book kept for that purpose at every boarding-house, as at Buxton, and subscribe one shilling."

Nevertheless, that little "parade" played an important role in the story of late eighteenth-century Blackpool. I find it impossible to resist from quoting further from the Doctor's little book.

"Here [he tells us of this same promenade] is a full display of beauty and of fashion. Here the eye faithful to its trust, conveys intelligence from the heart of one sex to that of the other; gentle tumults rise in the breast; intercourse opens in tender language; the softer passions are called into action; Hymen approaches, kindles his torch, and cements that union which continues for life. Here may be seen folly flushed with money, shoe-strings, and a phaeton and four. Keen envy sparkles in the eye at the display of a new bonnet. The heiress of eighteen trimmed in black, and a hundred thousand pounds, plentifully squanders her looks of disdain, or the stale *Belle*, who has outstood her market, offers her fading charms upon easy terms."

Yet, away from that promenade and in the sea itself, bathing was controlled with a decorum which, one feels, must have been hardly obeyed by some of those who took part in that "display of beauty and of fashion". However mere male might cast covetous looks upon the maidens who sauntered past, he was not allowed to cast an eye over them when shorn of their feathers and finery. As the hour of high tide approached, a bell rang out, and this was the signal that all men must leave the sea and withdraw to the privacy of their hotels or boarding houses. Any failing to do this were fined—not the Doctor's ubiquitous shilling but the much sterner penalty of a bottle of wine.

The menfolk safely indoors, the ladies came unblushingly—at least, one supposes it would be that, although no man scribe could have been present to record it—and went into the sea. Then the bell rang again, the ladies withdrew, and the men came out

again. I wonder if that strange custom is connected with the little weather-houses where impending changes are said to be foretold by the appearance of either man or maid.

Still, in spite of such strict codes of rules and of men like Dr Hutton with a penchant for fines, Blackpool grew, and the once unpretentious hamlet became quite a fashionable little watering place. An early teething trouble came when some of the more prosperous hotel proprietors began to buy up as much land as they could, their object being to put a halt to future development and, of course, prevent the building of those lesser establishments which would seek to undermine their own businesses. Had the ruse succeeded, it is obvious that Blackpool would, so early in its career, have received a set-back, from which it might never have recovered. However, Lancashire has ever had its Hampden. A Mr Banks beat the hoteliers at their own game, purchased a deal of land, and put up more houses offering accommodation at more reasonable terms.

By 1824, development had been sufficient to enable up to 1,000 visitors to be accommodated during the height of the season. There was a suggestion that a canal be cut through the Fylde from Preston in order to ease the method of approach. Nothing was done, but little more than a couple of decades later the railway line was opened, and Blackpool was definitely "on the map" as a growing resort. Then came Mr Cook—yet another of those ingenious folk who crop up from time to time when dealing with this early rise of Blackpool, men with foresight and vision who gave a fine start to the vogue that Blackpool must always be a step in front of its rivals.

It was Mr Cook who organised a system of postal services to and from the town; it was Mr Cook who made an arrangement with the officials of the newly opened railway whereby the folk of the Lancashire towns should be conveyed on special terms from their home stations and back again in a single day—the fore-runners of the present excursions. If Banks was Blackpool's Hampden, then Cook, who was an American by birth, has been fittingly styled by Porter as its "Beau Nash".

Piece by piece, the promenade was extended. In 1862, work on the building of the North Pier commenced. Six years later the Central Pier came into being. The South Pier came later. In 1876, Blackpool, now the permanent home of some 10,000 folk, was

granted its Charter of Incorporation, and three years afterwards made history by being the first resort in the country to secure powers to levy a rate to be spent on advertising. It continued such pioneer work. It was the first town in Britain to introduce street lighting; the first in England to have its own fleet of electric tram-cars.

The Victorian period of the late nineteenth century, as we have already seen, was a time of rapid expansion and building. The pattern of the Blackpool of the future was being laid down. But the town is still extending and expanding.

We have met Mr Whiteside, Mr Banks, and Mr Cook. Let us now meet Ned Boswell, member of the famous gypsy family, who came to Blackpool and camped on the north cliffs, near the Gynn hotel, in the 1830's. He, too, was a pioneer, a pioneer of the one-time noted Blackpool gypsyry established on the north cliffs and then removed to the sandhills at South Shore until it was condemned by the local authority in 1910. There are still many gypsies in Blackpool. We meet them about the Golden Mile; some travel far afield, and I have often found them at the historic Brough Hill fair, held on the Pennine fells not far from Kirkby Stephen, and on the borders of Yorkshire and Westmorland at the end of September.

Ned Boswell remained there for about forty years until he was joined by more of the Boswell "clan", as well as the Lees and Youngs, and later came the Greys, the Herons, and the Franklins, most of whom had their origin in East Anglia. Perhaps the most famous of the old North Cliffs gypsyry was rare old Sarah Boswell, who acquired more than local fame for her skill as a "palmist", and later removed to South Shore so as to be conveniently situated for the visitors who were coming in from Preston and the towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Sarah, who lived to the ripe old age of ninety-two, is buried in the Blackpool Cemetery in the North Road, and was probably the first gypsy to be interred there and have a tombstone erected to her memory. At the foot are the words "At rest".

But before the funeral the traditional gypsy rites of burning her caravan and the majority of her earthly possessions were carried out on the sandhills near her last home.

The change in site from the north to one where the Pleasure Beach now stands was made in the closing decade of the last

century. They were not allowed to remain at their new abode very long. In 1910—on St Valentine's Day—an eviction order was served upon them. The Rev George Hall, in his book *The Gypsy's Parson* published in 1915 (when the Blackpool gypsyry was still a vivid memory) sounds a somewhat nostalgic note when he writes:

“Living-vans of green and gold with their flapping canvas covers; domed tents whose blankets of red and grey had faded at the touch of sun and wind; boarded porches and outgrowths of a fantastic character, the work of Romany carpenters; unabashed advertisements announcing Gypsy queens patronised by duchesses and lords; bevvies of black-eyed, wheedling witches eager to pounce upon the stroller into Gypsydom; and troops of fine children, shock-headed and jolly—all these I beheld in the Gypsyry which is now no more. ‘Life enjoyed to the last’ might well have been its epitaph.”

The Rev Hall refers to “gypsy queens”, but the majority are agreed that the real Queen of the Blackpool gypsyry for many years was Morgiäna Lee, who in her younger days had been employed in the domestic service of one Captain Garnett, but returned to the road after her marriage to Bendigo Lee. It was long a firm rule among the Lees that they should marry inside the name. Yet Morgiäna's own mother was a Wood—Alice, the daughter of “Blind Nelly” Wood, who had married Henry Lee. The Woods were of an aristocratic Welsh family line and many had high reputations as harpists; the Lees were English. But tradition has it that Morgiäna's mother and father were married, as were all pure gypsies in Wales, by jumping over a besom of flowering brooms, a custom founded on some ancient belief in a connexion between the broom and fertility. It was doubtless from the Woods that Morgiäna inherited her gifts of foresight. Her daughters possess it still. Those who claim close blood-ties—and there are many about the Lancashire coast—also claim it too.

The gypsies were, in reality, the founders of the Pleasure Beach on Blackpool's South Shore, for although it was some fifteen years after their camp had been closed down that Roger Pye commenced the building operations of what was to develop into the greatest amusement park of its kind in the country, we know that Morgiäna's contemporaries relied just as much on the

roundabouts, coconut shies, and other various ingredients of the old English fair for their livelihood as they did on their skill at reading palms.

To the north, then, Whiteside's old cottage in the fields has been lost in the advancement of the town whose staple trade he instituted; at the south, the old swings and roundabouts of the gypsies have been supplanted by a more modern affair. What of Blackpool's impact on its easterly hinterland, the former agricultural lands of the Fylde?

Here, development has been that of recent years, but here and there we find some old homestead that was formerly one of Fylde's many farms. Here, too, we find the remains of some of the old windmills that once turned Fylde's corn into flour. Most of them were built in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and even so recently as the early 1920's nine were working within a few miles of Blackpool. The last to cease functioning, that at Little Marton, is on the outskirts of the town itself. It is some cause for regret that not one of the old Fylde windmills has been taken over by the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Windmills, which has done so much to conserve those of East Anglia and elsewhere.

The Little Marton mill ceased to work in 1928, and soon afterwards was purchased as a memorial to the Fylde author, Allen Clarke, and maintained voluntarily by a band of his admirers. More recently, it has been acquired by the Blackpool Corporation, and thus seems ensured permanent preservation.

There are old market towns, such as Poulton le Fylde (with its old church, stocks, and a quaint stone table formerly used by the Fylde fisherfolk for selling their catches) and Great Eccleston, and lovely villages, such as the Singletons and St Michael's-on-the-Wyre, within easy reach of Blackpool. These are visited by those taking a coach excursion into the country lanes. But truth to tell very few come to Blackpool in search of the rural scene. Those preferring the beauty of the countryside turn to the more northerly section of the county. Even the most vicious of Blackpool's critics and scoffers are bound to admit that the town's growth has not been at the expense of an attractive hinterland.

The farmer might have been the chief sufferer, and, doubtless, expanding Blackpool has robbed the Fylde of some of its productive acres. On the other hand, a nearby holiday resort of such size

means a good outlet for milk, and the wise Fylde farmers have exchanged their old arable cultivations for the rearing and keeping of dairy cattle. Today, the Fylde is as noted for the excellence of its Dairy Shorthorn and British Friesian herds as it once was for its grain. And champions at recent Royal and other leading shows have been bred within a few miles of Blackpool—on Mr Tom Loftus's farm at Weeton.

4

Always, however, has Blackpool turned its face steadfastly towards the sea, and its greatest spread has been in a northerly direction, along the coast towards Fleetwood. Bispham, Norbreck, Cleveleys—one by one these places have been linked by that great expanse of concrete road which has thrust itself along the elevated mass of boulder clay bordering the sea.

That extending road, however, has done much more than bring changes to the coastal villages of this section of the Fylde. It has given a sense of permanency to the actual coastline not known before. Few towns have more cause for pride in a promenade than Blackpool. It is more than a series of concrete colonnades and shelters, of terraced walks and sunken gardens. It is at the same time a protective bulwark and sea wall for a lengthy stretch of the Fylde coast.

The erosion of the somewhat earthy cliffs hereabouts was a long-drawn-out operation stretching over the centuries. Once, the ancient forests extended far out into what is now the Irish Sea. Again, as on the coast south of the Ribble, there was that gradual nibbling away by the waters. Somewhere off this coast, too, is believed to have been sited the *Portus Setantii* of Roman times, which Ptolemy, the cartographer of the period, loosely placed between "Moricambe" and the Dee. Both the estuaries of the Ribble and the Wyre have been claimed as its site. The Wyre claim is chiefly based on the fact that the Romans drove a road through the Fylde in the direction of the coast. And Roman roads usually led to something very definite.

Some years ago what appeared to be a low wall was left uncovered by low tide some two miles off Fleetwood, but intensive investigations revealed this was the work of nature and not of man, and was no more than a rocky reef. *Portus Setantii* still gives

cause for discussion from time to time. Yet the mystery seems likely to remain unsolved.

We have also the story of a submerged village, the village of Singleton Thorpe, a mile or so west of the coast at Norbreck. One of Blackpool's early vicars, the Rev William Thornber, wrote a history of the district in 1837, and stated that in 1554 this village disappeared as the result of a fierce storm. He added that the inhabitants were forewarned and fled inland to found the present Singleton; but there was a chapel at Singleton two hundred years before the catastrophe, and the village has a much more ancient foundation. Yet Singleton Thorpe is no mere place of tradition. Remains of cottages were found during some excavation work in 1886.

Half a mile off Bispham, too, once stood the Pennystone Rock, where, Porter tells us, "there existed a small roadside inn, celebrated far and wide for its strong ale, and that whilst the thirsty traveller was refreshing himself within, and listening to the gossip of 'mine host', his horse was tethered to an iron ring fixed to this stone." The inn disappeared, the stone sank farther and farther into the sand. The sea came in and surrounded it, and, finally, virtually engulfed it. A very high tide of 1903 left as its aftermath the sight of the old Pennystone still standing. It was covered with shellfish. Now only the mere suggestion can sometimes be seen.

Blackpool's enterprise then has not only provided a promenade; it has fixed, one suspects for all time, the topography of the coast.

We can go by tram-car all the way along that all-important coastal road and so reach Fleetwood, the town that more than any other on the Lancashire coast owes its origin and development to one man—Sir Peter Hesketh-Fleetwood. We have heard of the Heskeths of Rossall, on the Fylde coast, between Fleetwood and Blackpool, in connexion with the growth of Southport. Town planning had one of its earliest pioneers in this family.

A hundred and fifty years ago what is now Fleetwood was no more than a rabbit warren of sandhills forming part of the Rossall estates. In 1830 Peter Hesketh, then twenty-nine years of age, was High Sheriff of Lancashire, and, as such, had attended the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester railway. It was, of course, the time when railway development was rapidly proceeding, and the tempo of the period being changed. The railways were linking the inland towns with the sea. Farther up the Lancashire coast the old

port of Lancaster had declined; the tortuous passage of the Ribble operated against the development of that at Preston. Peter Hesketh saw scope for a new harbour just inside the southern hook of the Wyre, and soon had gained sufficient support for his scheme to have a railway constructed between it and Preston.

Hesketh, however, wanted more than a port. He wanted a new town with equal facilities for the holiday maker. In a prospectus he issued, outlining his scheme, in March, 1837, it was stated:

"It has long been a matter of surprise that Lancashire, with its immense wealth and population, should not possess any Watering Place of the character of those in the South; indeed, there are hardly any deserving that name.

"It has been determined by Mr Hesketh Fleetwood to have that portion of his estate at Rossall, in Morecambe Bay, laid out in the style of Brighton and St Leonard's. The site is admirably adapted for combining the advantages of a Commercial Port with those of a Watering Place. The Preston and Wyre Railway, being part of a continuous line to London, will afford a cheap and ready access to Fleetwood from Manchester and other manufacturing towns of Lancashire. The residents of Preston, Blackburn, Chorley, and Wigan will reach it in little more than an hour."

The scheme was as ambitious as it was admirable. Many may have been interested, but little financial support was forthcoming. Nevertheless, the pioneer went on with his plans, finding practically all the money. A leading architect of the time, Decimus Burton, described as the "last great architect of the British classical school", was entrusted with the job of planning the new town. Burton made use of the largest sandhill, now called the Mount, as the focal centre of the town to be, and the streets and thoroughfares radiated from it. It is said that a plough was used to mark the positions of the latter in the sand. Captain Denham was given the task of making the harbour, and a Mr Locke had charge of the building of the railway line, for which the originator of the plan provided half the cost of £260,000. Work proceeded rapidly. By July, 1840, the railway line was opened. A year afterwards the town is described as having assumed "considerable proportions". Peter Hesketh had already received permission to adopt the name of Hesketh-Fleetwood; in 1838 he had been created a baronet.

The financial strain of the enterprise, however, was great. Only a year after the railway line had been opened he was forced to sell his Blackpool estates; twelve months afterwards the Southport sections had gone, and in 1844 he left Rossall Hall and retired to the South of England. His old home was taken over to be used as a public school, and the school authorities later acquired the property. He managed to hang on to his Fleetwood lands for a few more years, but these were heavily mortgaged, and in the middle of the last century those at Bispham and Norbreck were sold. In 1866, he died, at the age of sixty-five, in London. The Fleetwood Estate Company was formed to take over the property, with the exception of the docks, which went to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. Sir Peter's great-great-nephew, Mr Roger Fleetwood Hesketh, penned an admirable monograph of the town's founder when he was Mayor of Fleetwood in 1951, and in one striking paragraph deftly summarises the cause of the downfall.

"In embarking upon his great project," he writes, "Peter Hesketh was evidently impressed by the growing need for coastal development to match the expansion of the inland towns, and sought to meet this demand in the high tradition of eighteenth-century planning. What he does not seem to have grasped so clearly was that the demand would greatly exceed the scale of his own operations and would eventually lead to the rise of other large seaside estates, some of them on his own estates."

It does, indeed, seem somewhat ironical that Fleetwood's greater rivals, Blackpool and Southport, should both have been developed on lands once belonging to its own founder.

The influence of Sir Peter, however, still remains, and not least in the way in which the holiday resort and the docks have been kept apart. Always, Sir Peter planned with the intention of confining the industrial side to one compact area beside the Wyre, and that is still so today. Indeed, apart from the sight of trawlers and the Isle of Man boats passing through the estuary, one can wander along Fleetwood's promenade and about its gardens without any feeling of being in the vicinity of what is regarded as the third largest fishing port in England. We see the docks, of course, from the top of the Mount—and that is as it should be.

The docks, however, for some time handled a considerable proportion of Lancashire's shipping trade, and regular steamer services between the port and Belfast and the Isle of Man were instituted. Today, Fleetwood remains one of the chief ports for the Isle of Man passenger service.

Gradually, however, Fleetwood turned from general cargoes to the fish trade. The start of this was inauspicious enough. It has been claimed that the crew of one of the pilot boats amused themselves in periods of inactivity by fishing with a trawl-net very soon after the harbour was opened. Before long the Fleetwood Fishing Company had commenced operations. Boats came from the Lancashire coast south of the Ribble (where, of course, the retreat of the tide was restricting their activities), Scotland, and even the east coast of England. By 1860 more than thirty fishing "smacks", as they were called, were permanently operating from the Wyre.

At first they confined themselves mainly to the Irish Sea, but as the catches declined they ventured farther away. There is no greater fallacy than the belief that the harvests of the sea are illimitable. Every fisherman knows better. A part of the sea can be overfished and worked out just as easily as a field can be overcropped and its productivity brought to a low level. Fortunately, the age of better trawlers coincided with the diminishing harvests of the Irish Sea.

Now the trawlers sail from the Wyre to the waters off Rockall, the Faeroes, and Iceland, and of the Norwegian deeps. Men face all the perils of the wintry seas, and not always do they come home. There are few on the Lancashire coast who listen to the B.B.C.'s shipping forecasts with more intent than the wives and families of Fleetwood. Thoughts of the sea are never far from their minds.

Once, in mid-winter, I addressed the members of a Wyre estuary gathering. The audience was mainly composed of members of fishing families and of older retired fishermen themselves. The chairman, himself connected with the industry, reminded us that the fleet was on its way back to port. "The chaps have had a rough time of it, they've had some wretched weather," he remarked. The meeting opened with the singing of the hymn, "For those in peril". Never have I heard that hymn sung with greater feeling.

HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

It was a moving moment, a moment that brought me nearer to the real heart of Fleetwood than a hundred holidays in the place could have done. The sea attracts thousands of folk to the Fylde seaboard during the summer months. They only know it as a source of pleasure. But to these folk of Fleetwood it is something which determines their lives and, in its sudden furies, can tear families apart. To them, often enough, it is, indeed, a cruel sea.





CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN WYRE AND LUNE

I

HITHERTO we have been mainly concerned with a Lancashire coast in which the hand of man—and comparatively recent man—has been obvious all around. Now, with the estuary of the Wyre behind us, we pass into a section of the Fylde which in many respects differs little from that of the past.

The mouth of the Wyre seems to have spelt finality so far as the development of the holiday coastal Fylde is concerned. Fleetwood, indeed, calls a halt to modernity, and not until Morecambe is reached—and the Fylde left behind—does the conventional holiday maker come into his own again. Yet this part of Lancashire fits well into the scheme of things. It serves to emphasise the changes of the past two hundred years, and shows the real nature of the coast upon which a chain of seaside resorts, unlike any other in the country, have been built.

The peninsula between the Wyre and the Lune, indeed, is how coastal Lancashire might still be had it not been changed unalterably through the strange English whim of spending holidays by the sea. And even now it furnishes the rural area through which the Blackpool and neighbouring coach companies bring their holiday makers on the "mystery runs" through the country lanes that are an important part of the summer season.

Cross the estuary by one of the fussy little ferry boats that ply between Fleetwood and Knott End, and there is an immediate change of both scene and atmosphere. Knott End is linked with Fleetwood by traditional ties of the sea and seafaring, and today many of its menfolk make daily crossings by the ferry in order to maintain the old links, but apart from that the two are separated in atmosphere by something much wider than that caused by a river mouth.

Fleetwood has kept pace with the development of Holiday Lancashire; Knott End has virtually stood still. Doubtless the first reaction is one of quaintness, so far as the visitor is concerned.

Only those who have mixed with its local inhabitants know that something of the unbroken passage of centuries of life on a wind-swept shingle peninsula has entered fully into their way of life and created a rugged, almost independent, outlook.

True, the cinema there draws its audiences from a wide area, but there are other things that make an even greater contribution to the cultural life of the district. The Workers' Educational Association, that great institution that is so firmly established all about the Fylde coast, runs winter classes which receive good support; there is a weekly Men's Fellowship meeting in one of the chapels, where I have found audiences of well over a hundred gathered to hear lectures on varied topics. Those are the things that count here; the things that cause some change of mind but never a break with old-established custom and tradition.

Today the main contact with the rest of Lancashire is by the bus service which operates between Knott End and Lancaster, and Knott End and Garstang, and, of course, the ferry boat across the Wyre. Not far from the bus terminus, however, is the railway station—a "ghost" station that on August Bank Holiday Monday, 1922, had so many passengers to cope with that it was necessary to institute a fifteen minutes' service of trains between here and the junction with the main Preston to Lancaster line at Garstang.

Less than eight years later, 29th March, 1930, the last passengers were carried from that same station. For the next couple of decades an occasional goods train came that way, but even these became fewer and fewer, and on 11th November, 1950, even the freight train made its last journey. Since then only the "ghost" station has remained to remind the folk of Knott End of a railway age that lasted for less than half a century. And the railway line, that of the Garstang, Pilling, and Knott End Railway, though remaining, has fitted into the general landscape, and provides no more than an occasional topic for joke and jest among the people living in the villages between Wyre and Lune.

One feels always that a span of fifty years is little in such an area of low horizons, where the changes of one generation dovetail so perfectly into those of the other that their general effect is cumulative rather than apparent at the time. What changes have come about have mainly concerned the land, and show how hundreds of acres have been hardly won from the peat and made to produce their crops and sustain their herds of dairy cattle. And because of

the work of preceding generations of husbandmen we see a landscape of contrasting shades of brown and stretches of green. To some there is, I readily admit, monotony in such a scene; to those of us whose real hearts are in the land there is a sense of achievement, of pride in membership of a race that has turned desolation into something of productive value, and gained much and lost nothing in the way of beauty in the process.

Eastwards, beyond the flat lands, we see the hills of Bowland Forest, permanent and peremptory, and while adding nothing to the immediate scene giving it a backcloth that makes the sense of security complete.

Westwards, as we follow the curve of the coast into the Lune estuary, we look to the sea; the Irish Sea which has ceaselessly gnawed and at times bitten at the shores of shingle, mud, and sand. Beyond the tide and the wide entrance to Morecambe Bay are the flat lands of Walney Island and the green coast of Furness, with the Lakeland hills—the urbane dome of Black Combe predominating—beyond. That, indeed, is a view which even the most fastidious in the way of scenery can enjoy.

2

More than two hundred years ago, John Lucas, the North Lancashire historian, wrote enthusiastically of the peat fires that burned in the cottages along the verge of the Irish Sea. "A fire of peat," he told us, "is the sweetest and wholesomest fire that can be; and fitter for a chamber than either wood, stone-coal, or charcoal."

Today the majority of housewives would say that the dirt produced by a peat fire outweighs most of the advantages, and, of course, one must not forget that few modern fireplaces are suitable for burning turves, which really require those of the old-fashioned type with their wide chimney apertures. Nevertheless, I have seen the "rockles" of peat stacked in the yards of the homes and farmsteads in the vicinity of the ancient township of Pilling, and many are the peat fires that burn during the winter months in this low-lying area between the estuaries of the Lune and the Wyre.

Long before the time of Lucas, peat was being gathered from these Fylde mosses. Indeed, we have a record of Roger de Lacy,

Constable of Chester, granting the monks of Sawley Abbey, in the Ribble valley, turbury, or peat gathering, rights on the Lancashire coast; and the monks of the lonely abbey of Cockersand, on the salt marshes by the edge of the Lune estuary, had similar rights in the Pilling area. There seems to be little doubt, too, that it was the absence of trees in this area that was responsible for the Abbot of Cockersand being granted, in 1274, the right of taking timber from a wood in the Garstang area, some five or six miles to the east.

In monastic times a deal of Pilling Moss was no more than a black morass "mete neither for common of pasture nor turbury", but as more and more of the moss was drained the peat became more consolidated. Since then there has been a regular sinking of the level due to improved drainage and the drying of the peat beds. A century ago the depth of peat in many places was said to be fifteen feet; now it averages about six.

The rights of peat gathering have, of course, always been governed by old-established laws, and many farmers in this area have the privilege of cutting and taking peat from their own lands for their own use, but in other parts of the moss the peat beds are let out in strips, not unlike those of the days of the open-field farming, and these are called "dales". Time was when not only every cottage in the area relied on the peat from the mosses for a supply of fuel but there were professional peat cutters, or "greevers" (from the old Norse word, *grafa*, to dig), who saw that the produce of these Pilling beds was sent to places farther afield.

Today, peat cutting is mainly a spare-time job, done chiefly at weekends and evenings during the summer months, although the last professional peat cutter, Jack Whiteside, was still practising his craft in 1953. The methods, however, have scarcely changed, and to see a small party of cutters at work, silhouetted against the low horizon and with the curlews and lapwings calling over the dark mosslands, is to step into a Lancashire in essence far different from the holiday coasts south of the Wyre and beyond the Lune.

A peat moss, especially in a typical English summer, is invariably a wet place, and to prevent sinking into the soft, sticky ground at every stride, the cutters wear wooden pattens which consist of flat, square boards to which are fastened the uppers of a pair of stout boots or clogs. Time was when the horses, which were used for pulling the peat cutters' sledges across the mosses,

were shod in similar fashion, but the horses mainly disappeared many years ago and their place has been taken by the tractor, which is able to use the old tracks and farm roads to the edge of the working beds.

There is a deal of the symmetry of the accomplished craftsman about the work of peat cutting. A few deft strokes and cuts with a spade and the peat comes away in neat slices, all of the same width and height. A real expert has been known to cut 560 turves in twenty minutes, but the average rate is about 560 to the hour.

The turves are loaded on a flat wheelbarrow and taken to the nearby drying grounds, where they are placed lengthwise in long rows. From time to time they are turned, and then when the surplus moisture has run away they are stacked in cone-shaped mounds, with a space between each turve. This, of course, means that the air can circulate freely about them, and before long what seemed blackish, moist chunks of peat turn much lighter in shade, shrink noticeably in volume, and become tough and hard. They are then taken from the mosses to be stacked in similar fashion in the yards of farms and cottages for use as fuel.

It has been found that the best burning peat comes from the base of the beds. Here, a deal of it is dark brown, almost black, which denotes its formation in comparatively dry times when decomposition was a lengthy procedure. Above is peat of a lighter colour, consisting mainly of sphagnum, which was laid down in a wetter period. This sphagnum peat is mainly gathered for use as peat litter.

The Pilling peat beds also display a deal of evidence of the forests that clothed this part of Lancashire in prehistoric times, and embodied in the peat are innumerable "stocks", or roots, of the trees that comprised them. Most of the roots are of oak, yew, silver birch, and hazel, and it is claimed that some date back to 600 B.C. or even before that. Not so long ago, one cutter found the roots and butt of an old oak tree which weighed several tons and took three days to be taken out of the ground. The roots had sand on them, and it is assumed that at one time the sea swept over this area, killing the trees, and so started the swamp which is now the place from which the peat is gathered.

Not all the moss, however, is being used for peat gatherings. Thousands of acres have been brought under cultivation in the last two or three centuries and are now growing crops and

supporting the herds of dairy cattle. Nevertheless, there are still extensive tracts producing nothing more than a mossland flora of rough grasses, ling, bracken, and silver birch.

I found such a stretch of derelict land adjoining the farm of Messrs John Jenkinson and Sons at Crook-a-Breast, Winmarleigh, about midway between Pilling and Garstang. Here, some eighty acres of land had already been wrested from the mosses by previous generations and were mainly devoted to arable cropping, with potatoes as the main crop, and dairy farming with a herd of Friesian-type cattle. I went to this farm because Messrs Jenkinson had recently turned their attention to a section of the neighbouring virgin moss and had just won four additional acres, which were ready for incorporation into the general cropping programme.

To tackle such a scheme required not only vision, but a genuine capacity for hard work. Here, in this particular district, a former Lord of the Manor had restrained the activities of the peat gatherers, and with only the top covering of peat taken away vegetation had thrived, so that the whole was an almost impenetrable area of trees and scrub. Yet that same area bordered some of the most productive land on the farm, and it was obvious that if it could be reclaimed then not only could cropping be extended but the adjoining land would be freed from the constant encroachment of the unwanted herbage from the raw moss.

Fortunately, in this case, the patch of land to be reclaimed was in a fairly good state of drainage. Some years back it had been planned to establish a small coppice on that site and the land drained for that purpose. However, the coppice was eventually planted in another spot not very far away but, inconveniently enough for Messrs Jenkinson, in the very middle of what is now one of their largest arable areas! The one drawback, so far as dryness was concerned, was the presence of a large pond on the edge of the land to be reclaimed, so that a ditch was cut to carry away any surplus water after a spell of heavy rain.

The first real task was to get rid of the innumerable birch trees. Some of the smaller ones could be uprooted with the aid of a small tractor. Most of the larger ones had to be stripped to a height of six feet or so and then a winch employed to pull the roots out of the ground. The timber was carted away to be burned.

Even when the trees had been uprooted and the scrub and

vegetation cleared, ploughing was still impossible. Those great "stocks" already mentioned were still there, and these, too, had to be cleared as part of the reclamation scheme.

After that, the land was ploughed over to a depth of twelve to fourteen inches, using a single furrow plough, and this operation uncovered many more of the ancient stocks. It was estimated that more than two hundred were taken out of the four acres under reclamation. I saw many of them stacked on the edge of the unclaimed moss. Like great prehistoric monsters they were, monsters whose history is virtually that of the formation of the mosslands themselves.

The land was then disced twice, but as the work was entirely undertaken by Mr Jenkinson and his two sons—apart from the use of hired labour to uproot the larger trees—it was not cleared in sufficient time to carry out the original plan of planting with potatoes for the first year. Instead, ryegrass was sown, and this was ploughed the following autumn and the land given a heavy application of lime in readiness for potatoes the following year.

This work was specially interesting as showing that there are still many acres of mossland hereabouts that can be gained for the purposes of agriculture, and I had only to walk through the arable fields of the remainder of Crook-a-Breast farm to realise the advantages of such schemes of reclamation.

Adjacent to the newly reclaimed land was a patch of oats, and this was being cropped on land that had been won from the mosses some forty or fifty years ago. Here, it was interesting to note the different levels of neighbouring fields, brought about by the activities of peat diggers in the past.

This reclaimed land has proved itself ideal for potato growing, and this is the most important branch of arable farming at Crook-a-Breast, Messrs Jenkinson aiming at a cropping return of eleven tons to the acre. In spite of the fact that heavy yields can be obtained, the majority of local farmers have so far resisted the temptation to cash in by too heavy cropping; a policy that has paid handsome dividends, for there has been no trace of the potato-root eelworm that has played havoc with the intensive potato-growing programme in other parts of the county.

The land is, of course, almost at sea-level, and, as in all former mosslands, there is an intensive system of drains and open ditches. Many of the original turf, or spit, drains, V-shaped with the top

sods wedged into the cuts, are still in position here and doing their work well, but the open ditches—and there are between two and three miles of them at Crook-a-Breast—need regular attention. The fall is not more than six inches to the mile, so there is no constant flow of water to keep the sides and bottom clear of weed growth. Once a year all the sides are scythed, and the bottoms cleared out twice each year.

On this farm I saw something of what has been accomplished as the result of winning agricultural land from the mosses, and, because land is still being won there, I appreciated the amount of labour involved in the process. Because of my visit that landscape pattern of greens and browns took on a new significance for me.

There are peat diggers working on the mosses; the Jenkinsons and other farmers work in the fields that have been won from those same mosslands; and, nearer the coast, men cut turf of that beautiful green smoothness that is in great demand for bowling greens, cricket fields, and, of course, garden lawns. Indeed, Lancashire sea-washed turf is said to have no equal in the land, and here is one of the places on the coast where its collecting and cultivation form an important local industry.

Turf cutting has nothing like the same time-honoured ancestry as the cutting of peat. Within the present century the marshlands adjoining the south side of the Lune estuary were covered mainly with thick, coarse grasses which provided some sustenance for beef cattle and for the flocks of hill sheep that came here to winter away from the bleak uplands. The sheep, however, cropped tight, and their manure added to the improvement of the grasslands, so that in many places the end of the winter grazing would result in patches of a finer nature. Perhaps the local sexton, coming to cut supplies to returf some grave in the nearby churchyard, would be the first to appreciate its quality, but it was some time before anyone realised that this close-cropped sward had any commercial value.

The demand for better turf for sports grounds, however, opened the way for a new industry, and the patches of good turf were soon removed. Plans were put into operation to replenish supplies, so that today one sees areas of lush green grasslands as carefully tended and cultivated as any farm ley.

A patch of land from which the turf has been removed takes anything from fifteen to twenty years to reach a state of full

maturity again, and anything in the way of artificial seeding is frowned on here.

Red Fescue is the predominating grass, and not only does this meet the exacting requirements of the sports field and garden contractors, but it is capable of surviving the encroachment of the salt tides. The floods of the winter of 1952 showed us how much damage could be done to grasslands in East Anglia and Lincolnshire by the action of sea-water, but here, on the Fylde coast, "washing" by the tides is part of the scheme of things. During the two years before lifting, the plots are drained, treated with weed killer, grazed by sheep and regularly mown to increase the quality of the turf which goes to all parts of the country.

Often enough, when the wind has been blowing unchecked across the flat marshes and there has been a salty, chilling bite about it all, I have watched the turf cultivators at work on their plots. The industry may be comparatively new in origin, but already there is a hardiness about the men who take part in it that seems part and parcel of life in this section of the Fylde coast.

3

Pilling, the little metropolis of the mosslands, is in the centre of it all. For centuries it remained an isolated community, practically cut off from the rest of the county by the sea on the north and the "Black Lake", as the great area of squelchy marshland that surrounded it on the other three sides was called.

The isolation gave Pilling an independent character of its own, and although contact with the outer world has become much easier in late years, that character seems in little danger of being lost for some time to come. We are sometimes apt to mistake the individualistic outlook that marks the people of such communities as these as reflecting shallowness and narrow-mindedness, but here, at Pilling, nothing could be further removed from the truth.

A remarkable development of post-war years has been the formation of the Pilling Historical Society, which is, in many ways, as remarkable an organisation as I have known. It is, of course, a recognised fact that the history of Britain has been largely

woven round the activities of a whole series of different communities and areas. Each of these has its own story. Each reacted in its own way to the more general episodes which make up the more general history of the land. Studying the past life of any town or village results in a widening rather than a narrowing of outlook, for it is impossible to detach what at the time must have seemed tremendously important things locally from the broader picture of the time. And because the members of this Pilling Society have done this they themselves are fully cognisant of the real value of local patriotism and pride.

I have had the pleasure of attending some of the meetings of the Pilling Historical Society and can testify the eager, critical questioning that comes at the close of a lecture. I have seen evidence of the work done with pick and shovel in the excavation of historical sites. And I have read the recently published *History of Pilling*, in which the village schoolmaster, F. J. Sobee (whose enthusiasm has done so much to weld his own hobby into something which is now a useful force in village life), reveals himself as one of the most painstaking of research workers, in a book which is almost a model of its kind.

Talk to these enthusiasts of Pilling and invariably the subject turns towards the mosses. It would be strange if it did not. For centuries they determined the ways and lives of the local folk, and it is little more than a century since they ceased their domination. In the 1830's Squire Ffrance, of Rawcliffe Hall, commenced to drain his section of the mosses to open them out for farming. Other landowners followed suit. Thirty years later Anthony Hewitson was able to write of an area which had been mainly "cleared of its bleak, turfy surface".

The significance of that brief period of time is difficult to exaggerate. A journey to Garstang or Lancaster had hitherto been an uncertain adventure along tracks which were treacherous enough at all times, and made doubly so by storm, sea mist, and fog. No wonder imaginative folk peopled those marshes with boggarts and the like. Even those who refused to believe in these strange creatures were not without some fear of the bog, which was declared to sway and heave and threaten destruction to man or beast setting foot on it from time to time.

Nor were the stories of swayings and heavings entirely without foundation. The *Transactions of the Philosophical Society for 1744*

reproduce a letter written by the Rev Leigh Richmond, Vicar of Garstang, on 28th February of that year, in which he says:

"On Saturday, January 28th, 1744, Pilling Moss was observed to rise to a surprising height; after a short time it sunk as much below the level, and moved slowly towards the south side; in half-an-hour's time it covered twenty acres of land. The improved land, adjoining that part of the moss which moves, is a concave circle, containing nearly 100 acres, is well nigh filled up with moss and water, in some parts it is thought to be five yards deep. A family is driven out of their dwelling house, which is quite surrounded, and the fabric tumbling. The part of the moss, which is sunk like the bed of a river, runs north and south, is above a mile in length, and nearly half a mile in breadth, so that it seems there is a continual current to the south. A man was going over the moss when it began to move; as he was going eastward he perceived to his great astonishment that the ground under his feet moved southward. He turned back speedily, and had the good fortune to escape being swallowed up. Want of drainage is doubtless the cause of these disasters, for the water in a series of years collects below the bed of the moss, in a body sufficiently large to float off the buoyant and adhesive soil."

Such phenomena were by no means uncommon in the eighteenth century. In 1771 there was a frightening shifting and "bursting" of the Solway Moss. Inland, too, Chat Moss, that peaty area on the borders of Lancashire and Cheshire and not far from the outskirts of Manchester, once burst, and the black ooze from it is said to have travelled down the Mersey and far into the Irish Sea, even to the Isle of Man. There are stories in East Lancashire of Pendle Hill bursting its peaty flanks open, and, on the Yorkshire side of the Pennine, Crow Hill, above Emily Brontë's *Thrushcross Grange*, performed something similar in September, 1824, and the Rev Patrick Brontë preached a sermon and wrote a pamphlet about it.

Today, of course, modern systems of drainage and reclamation preclude the possibility of such strange, and obviously nerve-racking, occurrences.

To the north, too, the folk of Pilling had reason to fear the activities of the tides, which, from early times, seem to have been

in the habit of causing trouble hereabouts. Most disastrous was a storm of December, 1720, when some forty houses were demolished and hundreds of acres of crops ruined. The inhabitants petitioned the Quarter Sessions for relief, saying that "forty families are entirely ruined and without habitation" and were "dampified as never to be retrieved without charitable assistance".

This was one of the greatest storms ever known on the Lancashire coast, and William Stout, the Lancaster Quaker diarist of the time, attributed it to "a great wind at the west". Stout, who described it as "the greatest sea flood in the memory of any man living", estimated that some £40,000 of damage was done on the Lancashire coasts, and points out that "if it had happened in the night, as it was in the two days, many people would have been drowned in their beds." It must, of course, be remembered that his figure of £40,000 is an early eighteenth-century one.

Since then, man has endeavoured to stem the activities of the sea by building embankments and dykes. Unwitting aid, too, has been given by the harbour authorities at Fleetwood and Heysham. They, of course, are concerned with the dredging of the channels along which the big ships must come. And a deal of the debris is washed up on the Fylde coast, so much so that it has been said that accretion in the Pilling area has caused a rise of four feet in land-level in the last hundred years or so.

These things have minimised the risk of further inundations on a similar scale to that of 1720, but twice within the last half-century the tide has overwhelmed the defences and caused considerable damage. The first was in March, 1907, when a westerly gale accompanied by a high tide tore holes in the embankments, and before long much of the neighbouring land was under two feet of water. Fortunately, the village and the isolated houses suffered little damage, and casualties were restricted to poultry and lambs. Twenty years afterwards the sea again came over the embankments. On this occasion a strong wind whipped the waters over before the tide was at full, and fortunately subsided before it reached its highest point. Fields were under water and some of the low-lying cottages and houses flooded. Another six inches and the waters would have come over one of the banks and flooded the village itself.

Go down to that lonely shore, where the sea birds call and the curlews and lapwings fly overhead, and, nine times out of ten, you

will see the waves lapping peacefully at the edge of what seems an almost illimitable waste of sand, mud, and marsh. It seems difficult to imagine that same sea producing anything in the way of anger. But Mr Sobee, who, of course, lives in Pilling and knows it in all its moods, points out in his *History*: "The sea, like a restive horse, had to be kept in check. When the high tides are accompanied by a strong westerly wind there is always a danger of it bursting the sea banks. The Bay acts like a funnel and millions of tons of water are piled up, and periodically it bursts its bonds and causes havoc."

Enough then of Pilling's disasters, disasters that have played their part in strengthening resolve and bringing men nearer to the elemental and sounder things of life. Indeed, Pilling has no intention of living in the past. Enter it and you come bang up against the present. You are promised gallons of tea—jugs of it, to be more precise—and ham and eggs, chicken, and other "high" teas, by which, of course, one means the hefty meal that comes in the late afternoon and supplants dinner in the majority of Lancashire and Yorkshire homes. And lest anyone thinks that the folk of the North retire to bed with empty stomachs, let me stress here and now that supper is usually a good-sized meal.

Perhaps those who have crossed the mosses need, like Napoleon's army, to advance on their stomachs. On the other hand, most of them have come by coach and car. This is hardly the type of country for the walker. But those many and varied signs show that Pilling is determined to have its place in Holiday Lancashire. I only hope that it remains content with that place. Much of the Lancashire coast was once like these lands between the Wyre and the Lune.

The mill, of course, attracts attention. It is a tall six-storied erection of red brick and, like so many of these Fylde mills, is devoid of its sails. There has long been a story to the effect that the latter were blown away in a gale towards the end of the last century, and while such an account would certainly be more romantic, I must, in fairness to a place I have already connected much with storms and floods, record the more prosaic fact that they were removed when steam power was substituted for that of the wind in 1866.

The mill was built in 1808 by Ralph Slater, who is credited with accomplishing the entire job single-handed in three weeks.

For centuries before that, however, there had been mills at Pilling, most probably on this very site. So long ago as in 1242 a mill alongside Pilling Water which belonged to the Abbot of Leicester, who had important possessions hereabouts, caused a dispute between his community and that of Cockersand. When the present mill ceased to work in 1926 it broke a sequence extending at least as far back as the middle of the thirteenth century.

There has been a church at Pilling since monastic times, but, unlike that of the windmill, the site of the present building does not represent a continuity of use.

There is a tradition that the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem had a chapel in the vicinity of Pilling in the twelfth century, and later a monk from Cockersand Abbey seems to have held services there for the local folk. After the dissolution of the abbey in 1539 it fell into a state of disuse, but we again hear of services being held in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century it was found to be far too small to accommodate the number of folk who wished to attend.

In 1716 arrangements were made to build a new church, and the old one was dismantled. Before long, little remained to mark even the site. Its stones were used for the foundations of its successor the following year, and the rest proved the usual convenient quarry for farmers and others requiring ready dressed masonry. In 1952, however, the site was excavated by the Pilling Historical Society, and much of the original foundation revealed.

Meanwhile, a new and larger church was built on a site nearer the village, and then in 1887 a further change of site was made and the present erection, which has been called the "Cathedral of the Marsh", was built.

The "old church", as the 1717 building is now called, still stands, and today one senses something of the old individuality of the village by recalling the names and deeds of some of the incumbents who preached from its three-decker pulpit. There was the Yorkshireman, George Holden, whose leisure time seems to have been mainly spent in a study of the tides, and who compiled a tide-table for Liverpool Bay which is still in use today. He was curate here from 1758 to 1767, and the sundial over the door of the "old church" perpetuates his memory.

William Bateson, who was appointed to the curacy in October,

1781, was suspended eleven years later "for drunkenness, neglect of his ministerial duties and also for enormous crimes". James Potter, who was appointed in 1802 and died here in 1825—his grave is in the churchyard—seems to have done a deal which might easily have brought him into trouble, but evaded "suspension". He was a cock-fighting enthusiast and seems to have been fond of a fight. Nevertheless, his preaching was so good that the church was packed Sunday after Sunday, and interior structural changes had to be made to accommodate all who wished to hear him. The late Allen Clarke, in his *Windmill Land*, quotes a local as saying he was "th' best preacher and feighter as ever came to Pilling", and goes on to add: "A man may have many a worse epitaph than that."

Wandering about Pilling, one can hear many stories of Parson Potter, and of his cock-fighting and bouts of fisticuffs, but doubtless Mr Sobee is not far from the truth when he records: "It might be well to remember that at this time there was a tremendous religious revival in the birth of Wesleyan Methodism, whose followers frowned severely on such activities."

But the incumbent who is most often remembered is the Rev J. D. Banister, who was the first vicar of the parish and who served his parishioners from 1825 until his retirement in 1876. He was buried in the local churchyard. He it was who first began to unravel something of the history of the neighbourhood, a work that nearly a hundred years later is still being carried on by another generation.

A hundred and fifty years ago, we are told, the folk of Pilling watched the lonely shores for signs of anything washed up from some wreck, and reaped a good harvest. Today, those many signs of teas and the like show that they have turned their attention to other sources. But the summer visitors leave no lasting impress on the place. When the colourful lights of Blackpool have ceased to throw their glow into the southern sky, the tourists come no more for many months, and Pilling becomes its real self. Then, indeed, it is the true prototype of the Fylde show, the village that might have been repeated elsewhere between the Ribble and the Lune, but, thanks to the growth of the holiday coast, it is now outstanding as emblematic of so much that has departed.

The road to Lancaster crosses a lonely coastal marsh, with warning boards telling of the dangers that can come with the high tidal waters and, as if these warnings are insufficient in themselves, posts that record the greatest depth of water covering the road. Across the marsh, with its gurgling channels and still pools, is the estuary of the Lune, with a low green promontory beyond; a promontory that possesses a couple of ancient churches and a forgotten port, but, from here at any rate, with the belching chimneys of a modern factory much more prominent.

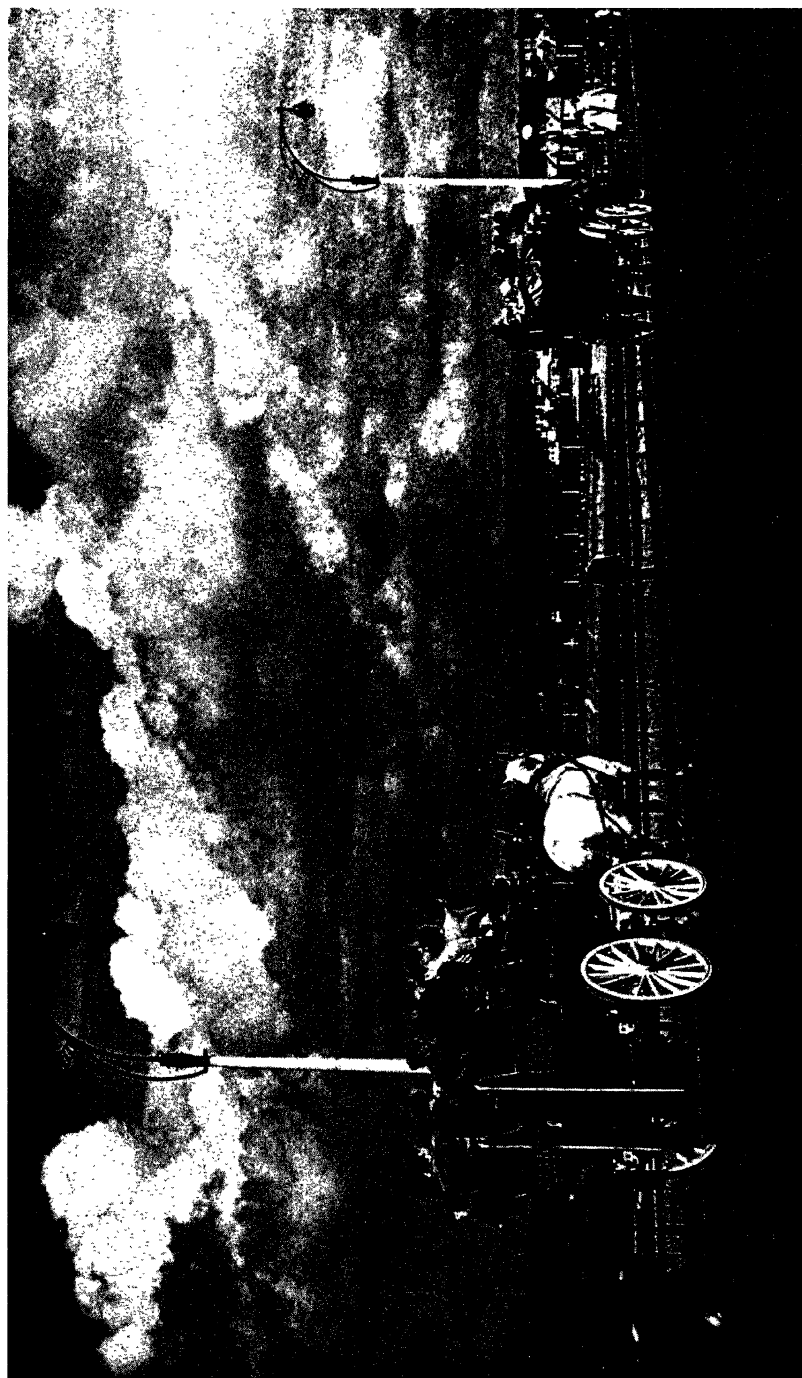
Indeed, it is pleasanter to look farther afield to the line of the Furness and Cartmel peninsulas, beyond the arc of Morecambe Bay, and the darker hills of Lakeland as a background.

The marshlands recede. The countryside becomes green again. Directly in front, a squat little church set on top of one of the greenest of hills marks the whereabouts of Cockerham, and, reaching it, we find it as bonny a place as any in the district.

The road to Lancaster keeps on beyond the village, but, going down to the salt marshes once more, a minor road takes us to the site of Cockersand Abbey. Here, on this lonely shore, a hermit named Hugh de Garth established a cell about the year 1180. Four years later this cell had become a hospital for lepers and the infirm, and was under the patronage of Leicester Abbey, which had established a small priory at nearby Cockerham some thirty years before. In 1190, however, the site was granted to the White, or Premonstratensian, Canons of Croxton, also in Leicestershire, who established an abbey there.

Neighbouring communities of monks, while outwardly serving similar purposes, seem ever to have been fractious and jealous of each other's privileges, and there were many bickerings and disputes between the establishments at Cockerham and Cockersand, of which that already mentioned concerning the mill at Pilling was one. As time went on, however, Cockerham seems to have declined in power and eventually became merged into the parent abbey, which contented itself with sending canons to perform offices in the church from time to time.

Cockersand, on the other hand, thrived and prospered as the result of gifts of land. The folk of this neighbourhood seem to have been both magnanimous and solicitous of the welfare of the





souls of themselves and their relatives, so much so that, in the introduction to the *Chartulary of Cockersand Abbey*, which was published by the Chetham Society, we are told:

"The Register speaks eloquently of the sentimental piety of the Lancashire people of the thirteenth century; but an examination of all the Registers of the religious houses in the county leads to the conclusion that the feeling which induced so many people dwelling in West Lancashire to have regard to the 'health of their own souls and the souls of their ancestors and successors' was completely absent among the inhabitants of the eastern half of the county."

Friendly as were the people of West Lancashire, the canons could count on little help from natural sources. The selection of a site on the edge of the sea may have been ideal from the point of view of meditation and religious devotion, but what was no more than the slightest of eminences on a tide-washed marsh offered little in the way of earthly security.

The early name of St Mary-of-the-Marsh, which was given to the establishment, in itself is sufficient to conjure up an impression of hallowed stones rising above an unfriendly shore. And when, in the late fifteenth century, Bishop Redman of St Asaph, who was responsible for the supervision of Cockersand, visited it he ordered that an experienced man should be sent to Lancaster to "conduct him safely amid all dangers of the sea to the abbey".

The surrounding marshes were, indeed, perilous in themselves. The ceaseless gnawing of the sea itself brought a whole series of problems. Erosion was quite gradual; there was no sudden rush of the waters—just a steady nibbling, a progressive undermining of the all too slight an eminence until, less than two hundred years after its foundation, the dark-red sandstone walls were themselves in danger of toppling into the sea.

An appeal was made direct to Pope Gregory X, and he, in October, 1373, granted a relaxation of penance of a year and forty days to any penitents who, over a period of twenty years, would give alms to the monastery.

Long after the canons had left the spot and the masonry of the abbey had practically disappeared, the sea continued its work hereabouts. Dr Whitaker, the great North Country historian, mentioned in his *History of Richmondshire*, 1823, that the sea waves

HOLIDAY LANCASHIRE

used to wash away the bones of the dead from the graves and leave them to whiten the sand.

Later, the monastic walls that had stood in danger of being washed into the sea were to play their part not only in resisting the waves but in helping the land to regain its losses. They were used in the construction of the modern sea defences, and today the once low eminence on which the monastery stood is some 25 feet above the level of the sea and eight above that of the surrounding land. What a pity that so little of the abbey remains to grace this mound.

An idea of the prosperity of Cockersand at the time of the dissolution of the greater monasteries, in 1539, can be gleaned by the fact that its annual income was assessed as £282, and in the whole of Lancashire only Whalley and Furness, both powerful Cistercian establishments, exceeded it.

The dissolution of Cockersand was utter and complete. In many cases a church or some hall occupies the old site and still endows it with some sense of historic dignity. At Cockersand only the chapter house remains, an octagonal building still retaining a deal of its ornateness and some years ago made to serve as a mausoleum for the Dalton family of nearby Thurnham Hall, one of whom eventually secured possession of the site and some of the estates attached to the abbey.

The remainder of the dark-red sandstone buildings, which for so long had survived their battle with sea and wind, were left to stand alone. No penitent came to their aid. Indeed, forces stronger than the elements contrived towards their final destruction. A neglected monastery was always a temptation for those who sought well-dressed stones for their own building schemes, and bit by bit the Abbey of St Mary-of-the-Marsh was decapitated. Much of the masonry found its way into nearby farm buildings; some went to Thurnham and was used in rebuilding the hall of the Daltons, and some was transported across the Lune to be used on the northern shore of the estuary. Much of the neighbouring sea wall, too, consists of stonework from the abbey; perhaps the most appropriate use of all.

The interior treasures were squandered about the county, but authentic evidence of their whereabouts is lacking. It has long been supposed that some of the beautiful choir stalls which are among the glories of Lancaster's exquisite Priory Church came from Cockersand, but later authorities are not too sure about this,

and the official guide to the church omits any reference to a connexion with Cockersand. Similarly, it has been claimed that the screen which divided the chancel from the nave was taken to Mitton Church, near Clitheroe, but, again, the evidence is conflicting. Tradition, too, has it that the original bells still hang in the tower of Cockerham Church, but if this is true then they have been recast since their removal from the abbey.

There seems to have been little doubt that the situation of Cockersand Abbey made the canons specially solicitous towards the needs of seafarers, and it has been claimed that they were responsible for the erection of the first lighthouse or beacon that guided ships into the Lune channels at night.

The Abbot of Cockersand had also important fishing rights, and the ancient fishing baulk, which can still be seen (and is in regular use), is an interesting survival of these ancient rights. It consists of a bank of stones surmounted by a hedge of wattles, some six feet in height, arranged in the form of an inverted letter "L" with one arm running out from the shore and the other extending parallel to the shore line. High tide, of course, completely submerges the baulk, but as the tide recedes the fish coming down the estuary are trapped.

Equally interesting is the fact that the Rector of Cockerham Church, whose predecessors (by virtue of the patronage of Leicester Abbey) seem to have been engaged in constant battles regarding tithes with the Abbot of Cockersand, is still entitled to his one-tenth share of the catch. This, of course, would be difficult to ascertain, and so a convenient, and very workable, arrangement has been made whereby all the fish found in the baulk after the first tide of the new and full moons is termed "Parson's Catch"—and the rector has the job of wading out across the mud flats to collect it for himself.

Today, only baulks of this nature which are governed by ancient rights and privileges are allowed to be worked, for in the year 1865 Parliament appointed Royal Commissioners who went round the country inspecting salmon traps, or "fixed engines", as they were called, and an Act of 1873 resulted in the majority of them being abolished. The Lords of the Manor of Cockerham, however, in 1866 had been able to prove that their right to use this baulk dated back to before the time of Henry IV, and it was allowed to remain.

There is also a certain amount of net fishing from boats, carried out in the mouth of the estuary. On the seaward side of the Baithaven Buoy, which is off the site of the abbey, what is called drift netting is allowed. Here a long net, anything up to 320 yards in length and some nine feet deep, is paid out from a boat which crosses in as straight a line as possible from one side of the estuary to the other. The free end of the net is marked by a buoy, and a sudden dipping of the floats is the usual indication that a salmon is in the meshes.

The other method, which is more limited in use, is by means of a draw net, in which one end is held by a man on the shore and the other taken out by boat and a large curve transcribed in the water. Once inside a draw net there should, theoretically at any rate, be no escape, but even so, salmon have a way of eluding capture, and there may be no silvery gleam of fish as the net is hauled in.

The most practised form of net fishing in the Lune, however, is that by means of the "heave", or "have", net. Here the fisherman goes up to the armpits in the water, and seemingly pushes a net attached to a timber frame in front of him to meet the incoming or retreating tide.

Although the number of salmon caught by these professional fisherfolk has dwindled a deal since the days when, a century or so ago, the indentures of apprentices at Lancaster contained a special clause that they must not be fed on salmon more than twice a week, anything between 75 per cent and 95 per cent of these fish caught in the Lune between 1st April and the end of August are taken by the net fishermen. In 1952, 2,005 were netted, and the previous year's figure was 1,859.

For some time, however, the Lune salmon fishing lagged behind that of the Ribble. In 1879, 2,619 salmon were netted in the Ribble estuary as against 357 about the mouth of the Lune, but the greater amount of pollution and the alteration of the course of the Ribble caused the position to be reversed. The figures for 1951 (the last for which comparative returns are available) show that 1,859 were taken from the Lune against 1,250 from the Ribble.

Still away from the main road to Lancaster and hugging the estuary shore we find a little port—Glasson Dock. Its name, we are told, really signifies a place adjoining a stretch of green marshy land, and so it must have been when it first commenced to take an interest in matters maritime, as the result of the construction of the first dock there during the closing decade of the eighteenth century.

Prior to that there had been a few lonely farmsteads and a little group of thatched cottages mainly occupied by fisherfolk, but that dock was unique in the land as the first to be fitted with tidal gates in which boats of fair burthen could float while discharging their cargoes.

That a port should ever have been constructed in such a spot doubtless comes as a surprise, for the place seems so well removed from any centre of population. Yet Lancaster, some miles farther up the river, had long had an association with shipping, and from the quay on the south side of the Lune ships had plied between the Lancashire county town and the West Indies, the Baltic ports, and other places.

Always, however, the silting of the channel and the fact that even below the town the river was fordable at low tide had caused a deal of distraction to ship owners, and, indeed, many of the larger vessels had to unload their cargoes at the entrance to the Lune and have them brought by lighters to the quay in the town itself.

Nevertheless, the merchants of eighteenth-century Lancaster depended on sea communications for their prosperity, and when, in 1749, Parliament agreed to the setting up of an independent Port Commission the first steps were directed to improve the facilities for ships coming to the Lune. The line of quays in Lancaster was extended seaward, and in 1772 Parliamentary permission to make a harbour nearer the river mouth was obtained. Glasson was selected as the site and work began in 1783. Within four years ships were able to use the dock, and in 1791 it was finally completed. A writer of the time commented on the fact that the spring tide was apt to rise to thirty feet, "considerably more than it flows at Liverpool".

About the same time the new dock was opened plans were

also put in operation to construct a canal from Wigan to Kendal, with a branch running from just south of Lancaster to Glasson Dock and so give access to the sea. This branch was finally completed in 1825, a lock being constructed so that sea-going vessels up to 250 tons would be able to pass. In May of the following year, the *Lancaster Gazette* announced that the first vessel, a sloop named the *Sprightly*, had passed through the lock on her way to Preston, and states:

"She arrived in Glasson Dock, with a cargo of slate, from Duddon, on Sunday, and being locked up into the canal, brought her cargo to the slate yards in Preston, without having been under the necessity of discharging at any intermediate place. The advantages of the time of conveyance will be very great in this branch of merchandise, considerable loss and expense having been always incurred in the discharge and reloading of so heavy and brittle an article as slate; and until this new junction was made, this inconvenience could not be avoided."

For some twenty-five years there was brisk activity at Glasson, and the port of Preston suffered from competition; so much so that plans were put into operation for improving the passage of the Ribble for shipping. Glasson's fall, however, was almost as rapid as its rise, and many factors contributed to it. The slump of the trade with the West Indies was perhaps most keenly felt, but when access to the docks at Preston was improved and the new quays were developed at Fleetwood, Glasson's fate, as well as that of Lancaster, as a shipping centre was ensured. The building of the new dock at Poulton—now Morecambe—which had a brief spell of popularity, added to the fall.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss Glasson as a dock merely existing on its past. There is still sufficient trade to warrant its existence. Most of the boats that come to it are engaged in the coasting trade, but from time to time one sees the Dutch, German, or Norwegian flags on the ships that lie alongside the quay. They bring in timber, rags, cork, and all those many things which spell atmosphere to a coastal place whose life is still bound up with the sea.

Then, too, there are always those who like to sail the home waters for pleasure, and yachts and the like contribute to the liveliness of the scene and add to the salt tang of the air.

As a port of importance, Glasson Dock may not rank very high; as a port of interest it has an honoured place on the Lancashire seaboard.

The road to Lancaster is rejoined near the little river Condor. Here, once more, the stream gurgles its way through the mud flats down to the sea. We rise past the Stork Hotel and then, with the river shut away from our gaze, pass Ashton Hall, once the home of the Dukes of Hamilton and now the headquarters of the Lancaster Golf Club, and so to the outskirts of the county town itself.

CHAPTER V

LANCASTER

I

DOUBTLESS I err in being something of a sentimentalist, but to me there is nothing more tragic in the land than a town or city which becomes forgetful of its historic past. Once that happens, there is every excuse that the outer world, too, shall fail to appreciate the part played by the passing of the years in the development of the place.

I know full well the dangers that can accrue from dwelling too much in the past, that twentieth-century populations need something more than old buildings and ancient monuments to sustain them, and that unless something is done to maintain the people then they go elsewhere, leaving nothing more than a lifeless shell, a museum devoid of any soul, behind them.

Somewhere between the two ideals, those of the sentimentalist like myself and those of the progressive minds whose thoughts concern only today and tomorrow, and to whom yesterday means nothing, is the balance so vitally necessary in moulding the spirit of any town or city which is to retain an undiminished importance in the changing world of today. Perhaps it would not be uncharitable to say that there have been many times when Lancaster, "time-honour'd Lancaster", has been in great danger not of failing to strike such a balance but of allowing its own history, known even to the outer world, to strike an almost unresponsive chord among its own inhabitants. Luckily, as in every place steeped in historical association, there have been enthusiasts, and these have succeeded in keeping alive something of the richness of those things which are the basic foundation of any civic pride or sense of heritage.

Lancaster has, of course, been fortunate in having both its castle and ancient church standing on the top of a hill, so that they dominate the city as one enters by road or rail from all directions. They speak of something permanent, something that has lived through the years and, unflinching at the convulsions brought

of stone which was later added to a great deal, and is now Lungess Tower.

Roger coveted power and, like so many of the early Norman barons, his desires were not always tempered with sound judgment. During the reign of Henry I he supported his brother Robert of Bellême, against the Crown. In 1102 the whole family was expelled from England, and Roger's estates passed into possession of the king.

Richard I was, of course, overbusy about his affairs in the Land, and he handed over the Honor of Lancaster to his young brother, the infamous John, then Earl of Mortain. Hard to have been said and written about John, and doubtless he justified them all, yet as Earl of Mortain he bestowed many benefits on the peoples of his possessions. Perhaps he wished to enlist their support for his own projected rising against Richard, but, whatever the end, he it was who on 12th June, 1193, granted the charter which founded the borough of Lancaster; and, later, having ascended the throne on the death of his brother, he extended the original of Roger de Poitou to as fine a specimen of a medieval case could be found in the land.

For some time the Honor of Lancaster fluctuated between members of the royal house and their favourites, but in the reign of Edward III the dukedom—as it was now—came by marriage to the king's fourth son, John of Gaunt, the great name that seems to have been indelibly linked with the story of the castle. He it is who is generally credited with the building of the magnificent gateway, probably unequalled for grandeur by any other in the country, but evidence seems to show that while he may have been responsible for starting the work, the bulk of the upper portion of a somewhat later date.

He was succeeded by his son, Henry Plantagenet, who incurred the wrath of his cousin, King Richard II, and was banished from the kingdom, his estates passing to the Crown. Richard, however, lost his throne, and the dispossessed Duke of Lancaster created Henry IV. It was then that the practice of whoever occupied the Throne should also be Duke of Lancaster came into operation, for, according to Edward Baines's authoritative *History of Lancashire*, 1824, the new king stipulated that

“neither the inheritance of his duchy of Lancaster, c

ies, should be changed, transferred, or diminished, through assumption of the royal dignity; but that they should retain distinctive character and privileges, and be governed in manner, as if he had never attained the royal dignity."

since it has been the custom of the reigning monarch to the title of Duke of Lancaster, and, of course, the duties to the dukedom are exercised quite apart from those associated with the Crown. Because of this we have the strange anomaly whereby the present queen is *Duke* of Lancaster and the loyal toast, used on all official occasions within the is "The Queen; the Duke of Lancaster."

very strength and completeness of the castle as we see it suggests that, on the whole, it suffered little during the civil wars and occasions of strife in the past. It was somewhat far south to be affected by the turmoil of Border wars although the Dukes of Lancaster played such important parts in the Wars of the Roses, Lancaster itself escaped the real battle. In Tudor times, the pile seems to have been somewhat neglected, but Queen Elizabeth I ordered its renovation, and the keep was strengthened.

In the long-threatened strife between King Charles and his Parliament, the civil war first blazed out, Lancaster first declared for the king, but later, rendered, without any struggle, to a Parliamentary force and moved forward from Manchester. That was in February, 1643. In March, the commander of the Parliamentary forces in Lancashire, Colonel Sir John Seton, received intelligence to the effect that "there was a Spanish ship blown in with a storm to the waters and had a leak". Her main cargo consisted of a complement of twenty-two guns and ammunition for the defence of the castle. Four Parliamentary companies were sent out to capture the ship.

Meanwhile, news of the wreck had reached the Royalist commander, the Earl of Derby, and he immediately despatched a force of cavalry with orders to destroy the ship. The Parliamentarians, thinking doubtless that stronger forces were in the field, the mounted troops, shirked the conflict, and Derby's force succeeded in setting fire to the vessel and then withdrew. Derby's forces, however, died out before the guns were damaged, and as no one to stop the Parliamentarians seizing possession

and taking the guns and ammunition by boat round the coast and up the Lune to Lancaster. Meanwhile, the defenders of Manchester, Preston, and Bolton were arguing as to who should have the ordnance, but they remained at the castle. Derby was to regret the failure of the attempt at destruction before long.

A fortnight later, Derby came to Lancaster itself with a force mustering twice that of the defenders. He called upon the mayor to surrender town and castle. The mayor's reply was evasive. "We do return this answer," he said, "that all our arms are under the command of officers now within this town, for the king and Parliament, so that we have not the disposal of them."

Derby went into the attack, but the guns his cavalry had failed to deal with turned the scales against his superior man-power. While a second attack was being planned, news came through that there was no further powder for the guns. Again the Royalists attacked, and again the defence was stubborn. Derby's own report summarises what followed:

"I made bold to burn the greatest part of the town, and in it many of their soldiers, who defended very sharply for two hours. But we beat them to the castle, and I, seeing the town clear from all but smoke, spared the remainder of the town and laid siege to the castle. There was no woman or child suffered, or any but those who did bear arms, for so I gave directions to my soldiers."

Mr Mayor was taken prisoner, but again the castle held out. And, taking advantage of the general confusion, some of the defending garrison came out and helped themselves to the Royalist provisions.

News was sent to Preston telling of the attack, and the Parliamentarians, who were in force there, sent along some 2,000 men to raise the siege. Now my Lord Derby decided on retreat, or, as he put it, "thought it well to slip on to Preston". The Royalists went south, following roughly the course of the A.6 road; the Parliamentarians veered to the west, approaching Lancaster via Cockerham. The upshot was that the two armies by-passed each other. Lancaster was strengthened, but at Preston's expense. Derby had little difficulty in taking the Ribbleside town.

Derby's apparent supremacy was short-lived. Came a series of defeats and his army fled north, retiring in disorder in the direction

of Westmorland. The Parliamentary commander now decided that he could reduce the armament at Lancaster Castle, and had fourteen of the guns sent to Manchester. There they were fired, but not in anger, on a day of rejoicing, and, it is recorded, they astounded the local populace "in no small degree by the sound!"

The Royalists were to carry out another attack on Lancaster Castle later in the summer, and actually besieged the town for some three weeks; but in the end they were beaten off, and soon afterwards the Earl of Derby fled to the Isle of Man.

During the winter months the garrison was strengthened, but nothing of importance happened for over a year. In 1645 the castle was occupied, in the Parliamentary cause, by what has been described as

"a rude company of Yorkshire troopers, the cruellest persons this county was ever pestered with—men that could not be pleased with their quarters, either for themselves or their horses, and for their own advantage would quarter themselves as far from the Castle as the bottom of the Fylde country!"

Like the majority of English castles, Lancaster was ordered to be "slighted" after the conclusion of the Civil Wars, although the Order in Council spared "such parts thereof as are necessary for the sitting of the Courts of Justice and for the keep of the Common Gaol of the County". The guns and ammunition were to be sent to Liverpool; Preston, whose church had been stripped of lead in order to make bullets, was to receive replenishments from Lancaster.

The governor of the castle, however, seems to have been a master of the art of dilatation, and the work dragged on until the early months of 1651 when a deputation from the Council of State was able to report that the castle had been "so far demolished as to be untenable". However, before the summer of that year was over, Charles II had passed through the town on his march south, been proclaimed as king in Lancaster Market Place, and ordered the release of all Royalist prisoners from the castle. In 1663, its complete restoration was ordered.

Lancaster Castle also figured in the two Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. In the first of these two attempts to restore the Stuarts to the Throne, the Scottish and Northumbrian leaders of the insurgents were doubtless influenced by the knowledge that

around Lancaster were many Roman Catholic families, descended, in the majority of cases, from those who had stood by a former Stuart in times of adversity. The leaders, however, were none too sure of the support likely to come from the ordinary folk, and so, having decided upon the western road for their march into England, inquiries were made as to the kind of reception the Jacobite army was likely to receive when it reached Lancaster. The reply was, like that which greeted Derby when he had demanded the surrender of the town seventy-two years before, ambiguous and evasive. Preliminary investigations carried out by Jacobite supporters indicated that the majority of the folk of Lancaster could be relied on to support the stronger side!

Such uncertain intelligence did not deter the Jacobites from carrying on with their march south. Lancaster Castle was garrisoned by only 600 militia, and, as the required reinforcements failed to arrive, the majority of the troops were withdrawn to Preston before the vanguard of the invaders came near the town. The local Hanoverian leader, Colonel Charteris, who was about as unsavoury and vile a character as ever participated in the affairs of Lancaster, had the idea of delaying the advance by blowing up the only bridge across the River Lune. However, hardly had he commenced the work of demolition when someone noticed that the tide had gone out, leaving a ford which would offer not the slightest resistance to the men from the north.

Charteris's action had no effect on the course of the 1715 rebellion, but it did have a profound effect on the future course of the main A.6 road to Scotland. His early work so weakened the structure that eventually it had to be abandoned, and the present bridge was built across the Lune at a point some way to the east.

To return to the Jacobites. Doubtless they made a fine sight as they breasted the hill towards the castle, "with swords drawn, drums beating, and banners flying, and the bagpipes shrieking out wild notes of triumph". There was not the slightest doubt as to which was the stronger side just now. The folk of Lancaster, for the second time in just over sixty years, heard a Stuart proclaimed as king in their market place, and next morning adjourned to the parish church by the castle where, according to W. O. Roper, the local historian, "the crowded congregation, gay with the uniforms of the soldiers, and with the high colours worn by the many ladies present, prayed or seemed to pray with fervour for His Sacred

Majesty, King James III." I like the qualification "seemed to pray"; even Roper, staunch Lancastrian though he was, was not too sure whether the old citizens of his city really revealed their true loyalties on this occasion.

Whatever doubts may have lingered in the minds of the male citizens of Lancaster, many of whom were, quite obviously, taking the line of least resistance at this time, their wives and daughters, at least, *pro tem*, became the most ardent of Jacobites. That great splash of colour had them at its mercy. They fell, hot and strong, to the advances of the Jacobite officers. Little did they know, poor dupes, that barely a couple of days were to elapse before their temporary suitors would be paying similar calls upon the fair ladies of Preston!

Meanwhile, Peter Clarke, a diarist of the campaign, tells how in the afternoon of 8th November, 1715, "the gentleman soldiers dressed and trimmed themselves up in their best cloathes for to drink a dish of tea with the Ladys of this town. The Ladys also here appeared in their best riging, and had their tea tables richly furnished for to entertain their new suitors."

Next morning, the Jacobites continued southwards to Preston, many of them, Clarke informs us, "very sorrowfull to part with their new Loves". How quickly those sorrows vanished is obvious from the fact that only a day or two later the same writer was recording, at Preston: "The ladys in this town are so very beautiful and so richly attired that the gentlemen soldiers from Wednesday to Saturday minded nothing but courting and feasting."

Quite apart from the rival attractions of the Lancaster and Preston beauties, it is now obvious that the move south was fatal. Lancaster Castle was sufficiently strong to have at least afforded a chance of spirited resistance to the Hanoverian onslaught that was bound to come. Preston, on the other hand, offered little in the way of fortification, and certainly the Jacobites seem to have been careless about guarding its approaches. The result was overwhelming defeat, and a crushing of Stuart hopes for the time being.

Within a week, the battered remnants of the Jacobite army were again passing through Lancaster. This time there was no glint of drawn swords, no rolling of drums, and no swirling of bagpipe music. Defeat had naturally brought despair and sullenness. The whole glamour of those gay spirits that had caused such capricious flutterings of the heart among the ladies of Lancaster

had departed, so that Roper now tells us: "As the courage of the men of Lancaster evaporated on the approach of the Rebels, so the ladies of the town thought it expedient to ignore their former friends when they fell into adversity."

William Stout, the Lancaster Quaker who was living in the town at the time, continues the sad story. He tells of the prisoners who were brought along to be gaoled in the castle.

"About four hundred of them were brought to Lancaster Castle, and a regiment of dragoons quartered in the town to guard them," he writes. "They laid in straw in the stables, most of them, and in a month's time about a hundred of them were conveyed to Liverpool to be tried; about 200 of them continued a year, and about 50 of them died, and the rest were transported to America."

Inside the castle, too, were executions, and a grim collection of heads, with labels indicating the names of their former owners, gazed coldly from the outside walls of the gatehouse—a warning to the folk of Lancaster that the strong of one day might easily be the weak of tomorrow.

Thirty years passed by. Memories of the happenings of that momentous November week of 1715, and the grim aftermath of trials and executions grew dim. Meanwhile, the Jacobite standard had again been unfurled beside lovely Loch Shiel, on the romantic Road to the Isles, and once more the partisans of the Stuart cause were marching south. At their head was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the Bonnie Prince Charlie of both legend and history.

Again it was a November day when the Jacobite army entered Lancaster. Again, too, there was the swirl of bagpipes as the Scottish vanguard marched across the bridge spanning the Lune and up the hill towards the old market place and the castle. And, as had happened thirty years before, there was the proclamation of James III as rightful King of England and Scotland.

Doubtless the sight of the Scots in their midst aroused many memories that had grown dim and uncertain. And above them must have risen the grim spectre of those heads grinning down from the historic castle gateway. The folk of Lancaster watched, silently and without the slightest display of mass enthusiasm for what they now regarded, rightly as it turned out, to be no more than a lost cause.





If ever a figure might have roused enthusiasm that figure must have been Prince Charles himself as he marched through Lancaster's streets at the head of his clansmen. He wore the Stuart tartan and a white cockade adorned his blue bonnet; his bearing has been described as "one of confident hope that at last he would retrieve the fortunes of his race, and in due course mount the throne occupied by so many of his ancestors". Indeed, as Mr Roper pithily put it: "Never had Lancaster looked upon a braver man or a more heroic effort to raise a fallen cause."

Yet Lancaster remained firmly aloof. The Prince and his leaders lodged in a house in Church Street, now occupied as the local Conservative Club. Discussions took place; a local medical practitioner, Dr Henry Bracken, was introduced to the leaders as a likely supporter, and listened to the deliberations. Here the Prince's intelligence was at fault. Bracken was a staunch Hanoverian, and his object was to glean what information he could and pass it along to the opposite side. But there was no time for feasting; no time for making advances to the ladies of the town. There was a grim determination about the 1745 rebellion that was sadly lacking when the first Jacobite army had lodged in the place thirty years before. Romantic though he was, Prince Charlie Stuart was a leader who refused to turn aside from the sterner paths of duty.

Hardly had the last of the Highlanders reached Lancaster than the vanguard was again on the move—to Preston, to Manchester, and even to Derby, where what had developed into a threat to London itself ended ignominiously when the leaders decided to return to Scotland without even risking a battle, a retreat certainly not inspired by the Prince and in which he was never more than an unwilling participant. But Preston and Manchester had, in the main, remained as coldly aloof as Lancaster. Even the Lancashire families that had so often espoused the Stuart cause were no longer to be drawn into an affair which might bring even further disaster as their lot.

Lancaster had, indeed, changed a non-belligerent sullenness, that lasted when the main army was in the town, into open hostility as the last of the Jacobites prepared to leave. These men, wearied by their long march from the Border Country, had little time for resting before they needs must move off again. And so, egged on by Dr Bracken, the men of Lancaster captured some of the stragglers and took them to the castle.

December, 1745, saw what was destined to be the last hostile army pass through Lancaster's streets, as Prince Charles and his men continued their retreat to Scotland. There was, however, a great difference between them and the broken, disordered force of the first Jacobite army that slunk back thirty years before. Prince Charlie's men had not been beaten in battle. Perhaps something worse had been their fate, for as the late Halliwell Sutcliffe (as great an enthusiast for the Stuart cause as ever put pen to paper) wrote in *The Striding Dales*, the Highlanders especially "knew how to fight but were unskilled in battles that were lost before a blow was struck."

Indeed, there was much that was rebellious left in the Jacobite army, and the leader must have been hard put to it to prevent that march back to the Borders from degenerating into a revengeful and purposeless affair of looting and pillaging. What had been no more than sullen indifference on the way south turned into open—and, to be brutally frank—cowardly hostility as the Scots retreated north. Little wonder that there were occasions when some of the Highlanders broke loose among the jeering Lancashire populace.

The stay in Lancaster was as short as on the outward journey. But there was sufficient time for one or two scores to be settled. First of all the castle gates were opened and those captured between Lancaster and Preston released. Then a party made for Dr Bracken's house in Church Street, but the spy had escaped, and so the soldiers, after attempting to capture his wife and hold her to ransom, revenged themselves by wrecking the house. Another party made for the vicarage to settle an account with Dr Fenton, the then vicar, who had not only preached against the Jacobite cause but, as a Justice of the Peace, had been instrumental in meting out punishments to the prisoners of the two risings. Like Bracken, he too had fled from the town, so the troops threatened to burn the vicarage unless an indemnity of £20 was forthcoming. This was raised by the servants of the house.

A letter written by one of the Lancaster residents of the time, and quoted by Mr Roper in his *Materials for the History of Lancaster*, tells us:

"The rebels in their passage through this town last week behaved like a parcel of the most consummate villains; the

LANCASTER

meanest part of them pilfered and stole everything portable for their purpose, and their chiefs sent ruffians to plunder and extort money in a most brutal manner from gentlemen who had exerted themselves most against them."

Considering all the facts, who, in all reasonableness, could possibly blame them?

The Jacobite army moved off, and within a few hours the vanguard of the king's troops arrived, with the main force under the Duke of Cumberland, the Butcher of Culloden, entering the town next day. There were great rejoicings, as though of deliverance, as the duke entered the town, and the mayor and corporation went in procession to the duke's quarters to present a loyal address of congratulation from the citizens of the town!

With such a display of loyalty to the Throne, Lancaster's active participation in the Jacobite risings came to a close. Indeed, nearly two hundred years were to pass before the sounds of war were again heard about the city. And on that occasion enemy aircraft were the cause—and the castle was playing a different role, as one of the control centres of the Royal Observer Corps.

3

Such things as the wars between king and Parliament and the passing of the two Jacobite armies bring a touch of colour to the story of Lancaster Castle and keep up the impression that its solidity of form and outline is no mere architectural whim. But those same grey walls were not only called upon to stand firm against assaulting forces. They have ever formed an inscrutable surround to a castle that has housed the county assizes since 1176, and where, in the past, justice as stern and grim as it was often partial and nefarious has been meted out to those who preferred to obey the dictates of conscience rather than conform to the prevailing ideas of the times. Hence, the story of Lancaster Castle as a prison runs parallel with that of its role as a fortress.

There is, however, an important difference between the two. The arrival of an army, with its troops to be quartered—voluntary or otherwise—was bound to have important repercussions on the lives of the people of the town itself; a trial within the castle

walls doubtless aroused feelings of sympathy or animosity, but had little effect on the mode of live outside.

Not that the folk of Lancaster would remain aloof from what went on. Quite apart from the usual mob of sightseers, who probably found the spectacle of a man or woman being taken by open cart from the castle to the execution ground on Lancaster Moor, seated, we are told, on his own coffin, a macabre form of entertainment, there must have been many others who were bound with chords of common sympathy to the unfortunate victim.

There were doubtless many who sympathised with the Abbots of Whalley and Sawley, the two religious foundations beside the Ribble, for their part in the ill-fated Pilgrimage of Grace. Henry VIII's attempts at Reformation, necessary though they might have been, were carried out with a clumsiness that was bound to cause more than purely religious upheavals. On the whole, the monastic system cannot be claimed as detrimental to the interests of layman or tenant farmer. Sawley and two of the monks from Whalley paid the penalty for supporting the wrong side by making that journey from Lancaster Castle to the Moor; the aged Abbot Paslew of Whalley was taken over the wild mountain pass of the Trough of Bowland to be executed outside his own abbey. That was in the year 1536.

Came the reign of Queen Mary, with a revival of the Old Faith and a spate of Protestant persecution. Many of the old families, especially those in the vicinity of the county town, had remained, at heart, loyal to Rome; on the other hand, there were others, supported by the mass of the people, who had embraced the new ideas. A Protestant minister, George Marsh, was imprisoned in the castle for his "heretical beliefs", and in a letter he sent to a friend he gives an insight into the sympathies of the townsfolk at the time. He explains how he and a fellow prisoner, Warburton,

"kneeling on our knees, read morning and evening prayer with the English Litany, twice, before noon and after, with other prayers, and also read every day certain chapters in the Bible, commonly towards night, with so high and loud a voice that the people without might hear us read, and sit under our window."

Alas, for Marsh, the Bishop of Chester passed through Lancaster while he was interred in the castle and, learning of the crowds that gathered outside the windows, had the prisoner removed to Chester, where he was executed.

The next reign, that of Elizabeth I, saw the position reversed, and the Protestants back in power. Between 1584 and 1646 at least thirteen Roman Catholic priests were executed at Lancaster, including Father Edmund Arrowsmith, a Jesuit priest whose own parents had suffered a spell of imprisonment there for Romanist beliefs. He was executed on 28th August, 1628, and his head impaled above the castle gateway. The trial over, the judge was on his way south when he turned back and ordered that the head must be set in a more conspicuous place, "higher than six yards than any of the pinnacles".

It would, indeed, almost seem that something of that persecution mania which has gripped the minds of certain countries of the twentieth-century world took hold of the leaders of late Tudor and early Stuart England, for even while the Catholics were still being condemned, there broke out a new impulse against men and women accused of practising witchcraft. It was perhaps by way of a diversion from the usual religious prisoners that in 1597 the magistrates had one Edward Hartley before them on a charge of bewitching members of the Starkie family at Cleworth. He was sentenced to be executed.

But undoubtedly the trial which was to excite more interest was that of the infamous Lancashire, or Pendle, Witches, which took place in 1612. Harrison Ainsworth wrote a full-length novel based on the incidents leading up to the trial and the subsequent punishments, a highly coloured and exaggerated affair which, when stripped of its embellishments, gives an interesting picture of Lancashire life in the days of James I.

That no human beings could possibly have contrived to do half the things of which they stood accused never entered the heads of those concerned with the trial of those nineteen hapless females. It was said that they had met on Good Friday of that year at Malkin Tower, in the Forest of Pendle country of East Lancashire, "and solemnized this great festival day according to their former order, with great cheer, merry company, and much conference".

It was said, too, that by devious cunning acts of sorcery and

enchantment, such as the ubiquitous making of pictures of intended victims in clay and marl, and the upsetting of pails of milk, they had brought about the deaths of two men of East Lancashire. The evidence was of the slightest, and much turned on that provided by a nine-year-old child.

But all was not well in the witches' camp, either. There was a feud between the families of Southernes and Whittle, and each gave false witness against the other. And when a lady of more noble stature, Alice Nutter, took her place with the other "witches" it should have become plainly evident that in this case the accusations were mainly brought about by relatives to whom a removal from the stage of life would bring monetary gain.

Alas for the prisoners' hopes, all was ready for executions on the morrow, and the entire trial had to be rushed through in a day! Only those against whom the evidence had been even too slender to convince a jury all set for the ghoulisn entertainments of the morrow had the least chance of escaping death. In the end, ten of the nineteen were condemned to the scaffold, and the judge even congratulated himself and the court on the fairness of the trial!

One woman, who could hardly have escaped sentence, did at least escape the executioner. This was eighty-year-old Elizabeth Southernes, described in the official record of the trial as being "general agent for the Devil in these parts". She died in the unsavoury dungeons of the Well Tower before the trial commenced. But even so, someone had extracted her evidence from her, evidence which was to count strongly against Alice Whittle, her old rival. Old Demdike and Old Chattox, they called Southernes and Whittle. By those names they are generally known in the folk tales of the county.

Monks, Protestant preachers, Catholic priests, so-called witches—these and others made that sad journey from the grim castle to the grimmer executioner's block on the moor above the town. And, as seems quite usual in almost any phase of Lancaster history, the incidents were not without at least one grizzly piece of comedy. It was the custom, we are told, for the condemned to be allowed to stay at the Golden Lion Inn for a last drink before going to the gallows. And, local legend has it, one Romish priest refused this in his desire to get the dreaded execution over. Hardly

had the rope tightened when a messenger rushed up bringing a reprieve. A pause at the inn would have saved his life.

Later, prisoners were saved the long journey from the castle to the moor, for a gallows was erected at what was called Hanging Corner. This was near the present entrance to the castle, facing the churchyard of St Mary's Priory. Usually, hangings seem to have taken place early on Monday mornings and, naturally, attracted much attention among the townsfolk. Indeed, Hanging Days have been said to have been regarded rather in the light of a holiday, and crowds of anything up to 6,000 turned up to see the horrible deed performed.

The second half of the seventeenth century saw another wave of religious persecution throughout the country. This time it was the members of the Quaker movement, which was gaining much support in many parts of the land, who were the victims; and, of course, Lancaster figured prominently in the trials and imprisonments of the north-west. William Stout, the local Quaker merchant and trader, whose autobiography gives some of the most complete records of Lancaster in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, says that there were mostly between forty and fifty Quakers at a time among the prisoners in the castle; in the year 1661 alone no fewer than 270 served spells of imprisonment there.

Undoubtedly the most famous of the Quaker prisoners was George Fox, who was arrested while staying at Swarthmoor Hall, near Ulverston, and brought across the sands of Morecambe Bay to Lancaster for trial in 1663; the same year that Charles II had decided to have the castle restored and commissioners had been appointed to superintend the work.

Fox's own account of the trial is interesting.

"The session was large," he says, "and the concourse of people very great; and way being made for me, I came up to the bar and stood there with my hat on, they looking earnestly upon me and I upon them for a pretty space. Then proclamation being made for all to keep silence upon pain of imprisonment, and all being quiet, I said twice: 'Peace be among you!' Then spake the Chairman (Robert Rawlinson, of Cark Hall), and asked if I knew where I was? I said, 'Yes, I do, but it may be,' said I, 'my hat offends you; that's a low thing, that's not the honour I give to magistrates, for the true honour is from above,

which,' said I, 'I have received, and I hope that it is not the hat which you look upon to be the honour.' The Chairman said they looked for the hat too, and asked me wherein I shewed my respect to magistrates if I did not put off my hat. I replied, 'In coming when they called me'. They then bid one to take off my hat."

The offensive hat thus removed, Fox next refused to take the oath and, after further argument, was put in prison to await the next Assizes. In the meantime, Margaret Fell, of Swarthmoor Hall, who later on became Mrs George Fox, was brought across the sands for trial for having allowed her house to be used for Quaker purposes. Margaret was the widow of the much-respected Judge Fell, who while never a Quaker himself gave them every possible protection. As such she was greatly respected in the area. On her mother's side she came of a family renowned for staunchness to whatever religious conviction they embraced. Her great-grandmother, Agnes Askew, had also been a prisoner in Lancaster Castle "for conscience sake".

There followed a further series of altercations between judges and prisoners. Fox and Margaret refused to take the oath; Fox's hat was a frequent source of annoyance to the judges and amusement to those who crowded the court-rooms to listen to this quiet little Quaker who was more than a match for the most skilled of legal debaters. For nearly two years the trials went on, and invariably nothing could be done, and the two prisoners went back to their rooms in the Norman keep to await the next Assizes. In March, 1665, however, Fox had become something of a local hero among the folk of the Lancaster area, and he was removed to Scarborough Castle, from where he was released by order of King Charles II in September, 1666. Margaret Fell, on whom the sentence of premunire, i.e. the forfeiture of all estates and life imprisonment save by the intercession of the king, had been passed, remained in gaol at Lancaster until the summer of 1668. The next year the two were married.

The story of the frequent disputes between the two prisoners and the judges would have bordered on the verge of comedy had it not been for the fact that there is not the slightest doubt that the sufferings of both Fox and Margaret Fell between the trials were great. Their quarters were abominable, and striking as is the

appearance of the great Norman keep when seen from the courtyard of the castle or from afar, it was as dismal a prison as any in the land.

"I was put into a tower," writes Fox, in his *Journal*, "where the smoke of the other prisoners came up so thick that it stood as dew upon the walls, and sometimes it was so thick that I could hardly see the candle when it burned; and I being locked under three locks, the under-gaoler, when the smoke was great, would hardly be persuaded to come up to unlock one of the uppermost doors, for fear of the smoke, so that I was almost smothered. Besides, it rained in upon my bed, and many times, when I went to stop out the rain in the cold winter season, my shirt was wet through with the rain that came in upon me. . . . In this manner did I lie, all that long cold winter, till the next Assize, in which time I was so starved with cold and rain that my body was greatly swelled and my limbs much benumbed."

The tide of religious persecutions and imprisonments passed, and with it we enter another phase in the story of Lancaster Castle as a prison. This time the upper rooms of the Norman keep were used for the incarceration of debtors, and, until the passing of the Bankruptcy Act in 1869, most of Lancashire's debtors were brought here for imprisonment. There were, however, few of the unpleasantnesses associated with the earlier days, for rules appear to have been somewhat lax, and so long as the prisoner had managed to retain sufficient money to pay an entrance fee for a comfortable room, he remained here at the country's expense unless some benefactor paid his debts and he was set free.

Twenty rooms were set aside for these folk, and of these the most comfortable seem to have been Nos. 4 and 8, for which an entrance fee of £1 15s. was demanded. To live in the Snug one paid £1 10s.; in the Quakers' room, £1 5s., and so on until the Constables' room was reached and here the entrance fee was only 5s.!

Doubtless there were many who found life inside the castle less hazardous and certainly far more convivial than in the world outside, for there seems to have been no dearth of amusements, including dancing, concerts, sports meetings, and even bowling on a green inside the castle walls. The highlight of the debtors' year came in July, when a mock election for two "members" to

represent the ancient Borough of John o' Gaunt was held. Hustings were erected in the castle yard and speeches made; election addresses were issued and displayed on the pump; and on election day, bribery was rife, ale and legs of mutton being gratuitously given by candidates to their supporters. The proceedings ended with a dinner, and it is said that the day's gaieties involved the expenditure of close upon fifty pounds! Just where all the money came from does not seem to have been recorded, but there is no doubt that the creditors had no concern in this.

We are also told that the Tories invariably won the day!

Lancaster Castle continued to be used as a prison until 1915, and during the First World War also housed prisoners of war.

4

Prison life may, admittedly, seem incompatible with the more carefree atmosphere of Holiday Lancashire, but there is no doubt that Lancaster Castle is today a source of interest to many who visit the nearby coastal towns. During the summer months, scores of visitors pass through the various rooms and passages daily, and well they might for here they see a building which, more than any other in the north, combines the historic past with the present.

The opening scene, however, is one of sheer pageantry, for the visitor is shown into the Shire Hall, built on the site of the old moat between 1796 and 1798 and now used as the court for civil cases at the Assizes. The woodwork and carvings, much of the latter the work of prisoners, are exquisite; even more so is the wonderful collection of armorial bearings, reckoned by many experts as one of the finest heraldic displays in the country. These bearings, displayed on shields, cover the walls and make a scintillating parade of colour and grandeur.

The top row consists of shields bearing the coats of arms of the reigning monarchs from the time of Richard I to the present queen, a reminder of the close associations between the Crown and the castle. Beneath are the shields and coats of arms of the Constables of the Castle, commencing with the bearings of Roger of Skerton, who held office so long ago as in 1205, and underneath are smaller shields added by the High Sheriffs, who, of course, change office each year. The first is that of Bertram de Bulmer and goes back to the year 1129.

From beauty to grimness, from the lofty airiness of the Shire Hall into the cold, chilly confines of Hadrian's Tower, much of it early thirteenth-century work but probably resting on Roman foundations. This is used as a castle museum. Various objects of durance vile cover the walls. It behoves the guide to have a sense of humour as well as of the horrific. Mr L. Crook, who for many years conducted visitors through the castle, had both! His demonstration of how the scold's bridle was used to silence a nagging wife was usually accompanied by a knowing look towards the obviously married male members of his party!

The macabre atmosphere deepens. We visit the dungeons and shudder when we think of the poor wretches confined in those dreadful holes. Perhaps it was the darkness that was so terrible. When the electric light goes on, much of the terror departs. And, of course, the guide needs must tell of the over-inquisitive visitor who walked into one cell, got locked up, and had to remain until the next party came round!

Out into the courtyard now, to look up at the big two-storied Norman keep, the base of which goes back to the great Roger de Poitou, the founder of both castle and town, and who started all this story of quarrels and punishments, torture and grim justice. It was in the draughty rooms of this tower that George Fox, Margaret Fell, and other Quaker prisoners were kept; here, in later years, the debtors lived in much more comfortable circumstances. Better owe money, perhaps, than seek your own road to Heaven. Creditors could wait, perhaps for ever, but those who deemed themselves God's representatives on earth have ever thought hard of any who refused to follow blindly in their lead.

Up several flights of stairs—with the guide showing the results of practice, and the loquacious little man, inevitably a member of every party, who had so much to say about the scold's bridle now puffing and panting well behind—one comes out on to the battlements.

Lancaster lies below, dropping steeply to the River Lune, and the Lune itself winds through a flat stretch of seemingly translucent mud banks and pale-green fields to join the Irish Sea. Northwards is the wide arc of Morecambe Bay—blue sea, yellow sand, or dark mud, according to the state of the tide and the prevailing weather—and beyond it are the mountains of the Lake Country.

The first impression is that of beauty. Then one realises the strategic position of it all, and perhaps remembers that far beneath, at the base of Hadrian's Tower, are the stones laid down in Roman days when the great Agricola, coming north from Anglesey, erected it to protect the fords of the Lune.

The highest point of the keep, called John o' Gaunt's Chair, was the old beacon tower, the place referred to by Lord Macaulay in his poem on *The Armada*:

When Skiddaw saw the fire that burned on Gaunt's embattled
pile,

And the red glare on Skiddaw roused the burghers of Carlisle.

Down from the heights and into the Crown Court, a strange sort of place whose loftiness somehow fails to eradicate the general feeling of oppression. Even those who know little about the history of the castle find themselves somewhat awe-struck. As the result, the guide's announcement that more persons have been sentenced to death at the bar of this court than at any other in the country comes as no surprise. It is just that sort of place.

Here, too, is a little museum piece—possibly the only branding-iron remaining in the land. It is stamped, significantly enough, with the letter "M"—malefactor. Those sentenced to be branded had their left wrist imprisoned in a holdfast while a court officer pressed the red-hot iron against "the brawne of the thumb". The mark thus made remained for life. And an honest means of livelihood was no longer possible for its bearer.

The iron was last used in 1811, but for another fifteen years all accused coming before the judges in the Crown Court had to hold up the left hand so that evidence of any previous conviction should be revealed.

There still remains one further spot to be visited. This is the "Drop Room", and a heavy wooden door separates it from Hanging Corner outside. Here the condemned waited their turn for the scaffold. The last person to wait here was a crippled girl who had to be wheeled out in a special chair fashioned by the prison carpenter. That was in 1865. After that, public executions ceased. But the chair is still kept in the room.

Outside, the air seems remarkably clean and pure again. The Georgian opulence of the offices and houses facing the castle walls seems reflected in the light. Overlooking them is the great gate-

way of the castle itself, as fine a medieval structure as any in the kingdom. The earliest part goes back to the thirteenth century, but the major portion is some two hundred years later. In a niche above the gate is a stone representation of John o' Gaunt, first Duke of Lancaster.

5

Church and castle share the summit of the hill, and the beauty and quiet dignity of the former contrasts splendidly with all the blood and thunder of its more imposing neighbour.

Once more Roger de Poitou was responsible. He gave, by charter in 1094, "to God and St Martin the church of St Mary of Lancaster with all things pertaining to it", and for over three hundred years the monastery which came into being on this hill-top was a cell of the parent Benedictine establishment of St Martin at Seez in Normandy.

The Lancaster community prospered, and its priors accumulated possessions and acquired power in the adjoining lands of the Fylde. There was, however, always one thing that gave cause to annoyance. When King Stephen established Furness Abbey, north of Morecambe Bay, he included in the grants extensive fishing rights in the Lune. Indeed, the monks of Furness were allowed to make two hauls with their great dragnet in the pools off Lancaster, while those of St Mary must be content with the third. It would have been too much to have expected such indignities to be suffered without some measure of retaliation. There was surreptitious poaching, followed by a court action—and the Prior of Lancaster was told that he must be content with that third pull. Furness was all-powerful in North Lancashire and brooked no interference in its rights from lesser establishments.

Things changed in the early fifteenth century. King Henry V was at war with France and, not unnaturally, objected to revenues from English lands being taken across the Channel to the monasteries of his enemies. In 1414, the year before Agincourt, all alien priories, Lancaster among them, were suppressed, and their lands and revenues confiscated by the Crown.

Lancaster, however, passed over to another parent monastery, that time the Brigittine Covent of Syon, at Isleworth, Middlesex, the only one of its kind in England. The Brigittines followed the rule of St Brigit of Sweden, their communities consisted of both

men and women, and that at Isleworth was composed of sixty nuns and twenty-five monks. The Abbess was head of the convent.

For some time, the change seems to have made little difference to the inmates of St Mary's, for Prior Giles Lovell and his Benedictine monks still remained there, but when Lovell died, in 1492, a perpetual vicarage was created. This meant that the old priory church became the parish church of the town, a function it has fulfilled ever since. Until the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbess of Syon not only retained the right to present the vicar but it was also laid down that the vicar was responsible for the maintenance of "one decent chamber and stable, with the free ingress and egress to the same, for the officers and ministers of the Abbess and convent as often as they shall go thither".

Just what the church was like under the Benedictines does not seem to be known, but for some years before the change-over the revenues of the priory had been small, and there is no doubt that much of the beauty of the present church is due to the restorations and rebuilding operations carried out under the direction of the nuns of Syon.

Like the nearby castle, the church reflects the long story of happenings on the hill-top overlooking the Lune. In the choir are stones from the Roman basilica which stood on this very site, and brass nails in the floor indicate the position of a wall discovered when alterations to the church were being carried out some forty years ago. At the west end of the church a Saxon doorway can be seen, as well as an old font which might well date back to the same period. An Anglian cross discovered in the churchyard in 1807 is now in the British Museum. But undoubtedly the real highlight of the church is the magnificent collection of oak choir stalls, which even those completely unknowledgeed in the finer points of ecclesiastical woodwork cannot fail to recognise as something outstanding. An authority on these things, Francis Bond, tells us in his *Stalls and Tabernacle Work*: "The Lancaster stalls are the *chef-d'œuvre* of English woodwork, wonderfully alike in design and execution; in woodwork they must have been in their day unrivalled." He ascribes them to a period "before the arrival of the Black Death in 1349-50". Another authority, Mr F. H. Crossley, says: "They possess a wealth of flamboyant tracery unsurpassed out of France", and describes them as "the earliest of their kind in the country". These are, of course, the stalls once said

to have been brought from Cockersand Abbey, but few support that theory today.

The pulpit is Jacobean; the church tower, Georgian—and what a to-do there was when it was erected. The accounts of the churchwardens show items of 14s. 9d. “for liquor and bread at taking down the bells”; 5s. “for ale at the laying of the first floor”; 16s. 6d. “for ales at sundry times to the steeple”; £1 os. 6d. “for expenses at rearing the steeple”; 2s. “for ale to the ringers, on appointing the ringers”, and 5s. “for ale to the ringers on ringing the first peal”.

Perhaps the most disappointing feature is the glass work. Even the official guide-book to the church tells us that most of it “is of the bad period of the nineteenth century”, a piece of candour not often found in such publications and worthy of commendation. But Lancaster Priory Church has so many riches that, like Cromwell, it can afford to be painted as it is, blemishes and all.

One must, however, qualify these remarks by pointing out that modern craftsmanship has done much to retrieve the situation. Lancaster has its own firms of ecclesiastical window makers, and their craft ranks high among the old industries of the north-west. Many of the later windows were actually made in the town. No one can fail to be impressed with their beauty.

Lancaster, it must not be forgotten, is the headquarters of the King's Own—formerly the Royal Lancaster—Royal Regiment, and the regimental chapel, added to the north side of the nave in 1903 as a memorial to those killed in the South African War, is a testimony to the ecclesiastical workers of the present century. Colours, many tattered and torn, hang from the roof. There are monuments and reminders of the many campaigns, ranging from the Abyssinian war of 1868 to the recent conflict in Korea, in which men from this regiment have distinguished themselves. I understand that a visit to this chapel forms part of the early training of every recruit. I can think of no better way of instilling regimental pride.

In such a brief summary as this, I may have made Lancaster Priory Church seem little more than a collection of various phases of architectural detail. If so, the fault is entirely mine. There is a distinct sense of colour, of balance, and of dignity about the whole, as the various phases of history have been blended together by the all-mellowing influence of time.

And to hear its congregations singing the National Anthem, opening with the lines:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble *Duke*,

is to realise that here, as in the castle beside it, the time-honoured connexions between the Crown and the Duchy of Lancaster are remembered with pride.

6

We have lingered a long time on this hill-top, rightly so, for much of importance not only in the story of Lancaster but in the country around has been centred here. Now we must turn to the city itself, a city, appropriately enough, created by charter of the late King George VI on his Coronation Day, 12th May, 1937.

Already I have stressed the Georgian style of architecture that predominates throughout its streets and in its open, sunny squares. Today the majority of the buildings are used for commercial and similar purposes, and those who work in them live outside the city. Their interiors and their purposes have changed; their exteriors are little altered.

A hundred years ago, however, those Georgian buildings were still being occupied as residences. Charles Dickens saw them as such, for he visited Lancaster in 1857, and wrote of its

“staid old houses richly fitted with old Honduras mahogany, which has grown so dark with time that it seems to have got something of a retrospective mirror-quality into itself, and to show the visitor, in the depths of its grain, through all its polish, the hue of the wretched slaves who groaned long ago under old Lancaster merchants.”

The mahogany, of course, was brought by ships up the Lune in the days when the Lancaster merchants waxed rich on the profits they made from cargoes brought in from the West Indies. The ships, bringing in sugar, rum, tobacco, cotton, and other commodities, as well as mahogany, plied mainly in the so-called “golden age of Lancaster shipping”, the second half of the eighteenth century. They came up the river and discharged their goods at the quayside.

The quay—St George’s Quay—remains. Walking along it, one





gets all the feel of a spot associated with the sea. Only a few coasters come up the channel today, and the majority of these get no nearer the city than the quays at Lune Mills, a mile or so down the river. But between those mills and the railway station at Green Ayre much of the old port remains intact. There are the lofty warehouses, the lodging houses and old inns (some leaning hopelessly out of plumb and threatening to come toppling over into the wide road that separates them from the river), and even the lovely Customs' House, built to the designs of Robert Gillow, of cabinet-making fame, in the year 1764. The departure of its shipping may rob St George's Quay with its direct links with the sea, but it cannot remove the atmosphere of a port so long as the buildings remain. And the Commissioners of the Port of Lancaster still remain a power in the commercial life of the city.

William Stout, whose autobiography has been referred to before, lived in the days when Lancaster was beginning to develop its shipping trade. He writes of the early trading ventures between the town beside the Lune and the New World. He himself sent cargoes of butter, cheese, and candles across the Atlantic; he received supplies of sugar, cotton, and so forth by return. Not always were his transactions financially successful. Dr Arthur Raistrick, in his *Quakers in Science and Industry*, tells of one of his trading ventures on a ship trading between Lancaster and the Barbados, in which his part of the cargo was valued at £161. "It returned," says Dr Raistrick, "with sugar, cotton, wool, and ginger, to the value of £172, and a share of debts and unsold goods of £32, so that as he (Stout) says, 'the profits remained behind, if any, which were not easy at'."

The Quakers were, indeed, among the pioneers of Lancaster's shipping trade, and their efforts seem to have been accentuated by something more than the search for wealth. At the time Stout was preparing to send his first cargo across the water, a party of twenty Quakers left Lancaster to seek better fortune in the New World. This, of course, was the very time when the persecution of Quakers was nearing its height, and similar emigrations took place from other ports. Trading maintained a link between those on each side of the Atlantic, and there is not the slightest doubt that these ventures, dictated by ties that went far deeper than the accumulation of profits, played a part in developing seafaring commerce that has often been overlooked.

After Stout's time came the later generation of merchants, to whom the development of the New World colonies meant little more than an opportunity for enlarged business interests. Under them, the trade around the Lune grew, and Lancaster developed from a medieval town of little consequence in the commercial life of the country to a thriving spot of trade. It still retained its older links with the countryside, and was the market town serving a large area; but it also turned covetous eyes towards the New World, and its river became an even more important artery of life. The line of quays extended down the river. Not only did the overseas trade grow and the merchants of Lancaster prosper accordingly but ships were also built in the yards beside the Lune, and various ancillary trades connected with shipping flourished in the town.

One oft-quoted statement about the Lancaster of this time must be corrected. It has been said, on more than one occasion, that Lancaster was a port of consequence when Liverpool was but a creek or "hanger-on" of Chester. Such a belief is entirely erroneous and gives a picture that is entirely false. It is mainly based on the fact that from 1635 to 1639 Lancaster's contribution of "ship money" to the national exchequer was more than that of the Merseyside port. What seems to have been overlooked is that during that time the Privy Council taxed "men according to their estate", so that Lancaster's payments were based as much upon its status as a county town and its markets as on the actual amount of "trading and profit by shipping".

The major ports were London, Bristol, and Liverpool, and Lancaster never competed with any of the three. On the other hand, it attained a prior position among the minor ports, and, indeed, was the only one of them to engage in really intensive trade with the West Indies.

Charles Dickens, however, grimly hints at a less savoury side of Lancaster's links with the sea—the connexions of the port with the slave trade.

"The stones of Lancaster," says he, "do sometimes whisper, even yet, of rich men passed away . . . upon whose great prosperity some of these old doorways frowned sullen in the brightest weather—that their slave-gain turned to curses, as the Arabian Wizard's money turned to leaves, and that no good

ever came of it even unto the third and fourth generation, until it was wasted and gone."

Doubtless his remarks were in part based on some degree of fact, but the novelist spent but one night in the town, and his remarks were the result of gossip rather than anything in the way of investigation.

There is not the slightest doubt that the destination "Africa", listed in the records of the port, had its links with slaving, but Lancaster's participation was slight when compared with that of Liverpool. In one year alone, 1771, when the slave trade seems to have been at its height, official statistics show that 29,250 slaves were carried in 107 ships from Liverpool, as against 950 in but four ships from Lancaster. Nevertheless, there is a strong suspicion that many of Lancaster's merchants were connected with the Merseyside trade, for Thomas Clarkson, the great crusader in the abolition of slaving, reported, after a visit in 1787, that "though there were slave-merchants in Lancaster, they made their outfits at Liverpool, as a more convenient port". And a final incriminating finger was levelled against the merchants of the town when, two years after Clarkson's visit, they joined with those of Liverpool in resisting the passage of a Parliamentary Bill destined to bring this unsavoury aspect of trading to a close.

The real cause of the decline of Lancaster as a flourishing port and made whatever slave-gain there had been "turn to curses" was the river upon which so many hopes had been centred. Throughout the story of Lancaster, shipping progress had ever been punctuated with complaints about the shallowness of the Lune approach. In vain the Port Commissioners tried to stem the tide of approaching disaster by building Glasson Dock, but the channels still remained far from satisfactory. Liverpool prospered and developed; the Ribble was dredged and Preston's status as a port raised accordingly, and other harbours were opened about the Lancashire coast, including one at neighbouring Poulton, the then small fishing village which was the prototype of modern Morecambe. The biggest blow was when the imports of cotton from the New World were diverted elsewhere. For a while Lancaster continued its coasting trade. But by that time the "Golden Age" had passed. Lancaster could no longer look to the Lune for commercial prosperity.

If the transatlantic and coastal shipping trades declined and with that decline many of the industries associated with seafaring disappeared from the town, there was at least one link with the West Indies that remained and still figures prominently in the city today. Dickens was impressed with the beautiful mahogany work he saw in the houses of mid-nineteenth-century Lancaster. He saw more of it when he stayed at the old King's Arms Hotel (pulled down in 1879), where "a certain grave mystery lurking in the depth of the old mahogany panels, as if they were so many deep pools of dark water—such, indeed, as they had been much among when they were trees—gave it a mysterious character after night-fall."

It was about the year 1695 that a man named Robert Gillow, described in old records as a "joyner", came from the Fylde to start business as a carpenter in Lancaster. By 1728 his name had been entered on the Freeman's roll, it being said that he purchased the honour so that he could have the right of entering the lists of local cabinet-makers. Like most of the Lancaster businessmen of the time, his early fortunes were tied up with developing trade with the West Indies. He became a typical merchant of the period, exporting the products of his workshops and, in turn, dealing in wines, rum, and sugar which he imported from the other side of the Atlantic.

Always, however, his cabinet-making activities received pride of place, so much so that when Thomas Pennant visited Lancaster in 1772 and commented on the town's fortune in "having some very ingenious cabinet-makers settled here, who fabricate most excellent and neat goods at remarkably cheap rates", he was able to add that "Mr Gillow's warehouse of these manufactures merits a visit".

Some of the products from Robert Gillow's workshops continued to be sent across the water, but, at the same time, a sound local trade was being developed, and much of the finest workmanship in mahogany found its way into the houses and buildings of the town. A branch was established in London towards the end of the century, and a national trade and reputation built up. As the result, the firm rose to a position of prime importance throughout the land. Already when Dickens came along, Richard Thomas Gillow (who died in 1866 at the age of ninety) had severed his connexions with the business in 1830, but the family name was

perpetuated, not only in the name of the firm but in so much of the magnificent work to be seen about the town. Today, the firm of Waring and Gillow, Ltd., one of the leading furniture manufacturers in the country, still has its factory in the city.

The Golden Age of Lancaster shipping is also commemorated by many of the buildings that give beauty to the city today. The Lancaster merchants, it is true, made money, but there was a munificent spirit abroad that expressed itself by adding dignity and charm to a town that, apart from its castle and church, retained little to preserve its links with the past.

Ancient Lancaster, indeed, had mainly perished as the result of Scottish incursions in the fourteenth century. In 1322 Robert the Bruce and his Scottish army, with the north of England at their mercy following the disastrous defeat of Edward II at Bannockburn, "crossed the sands of the Kent as far as the town of Lancaster, which they burnt, except for the Priory of the Black Monks and the house of the Preaching Friars". In 1389 came a further Scottish raid and consequent conflagration. Little of the old town had survived the flames.

Afterwards, the state of the district was far too unsettled to allow anything in the way of permanent building, but as the eighteenth century wore on, there was a period of comparative security and tenure, and Lancaster was blessed with benefactors who were as generous as they were prosperous. So early as in 1720 William Penny had built the twelve almshouses for poor men that still maintain all the quiet serenity of the times in which they were established. A motto on the chapel enjoined his fellow citizens to be "not forgetful of the habitations of the poor". Before the century was out, the exhortation had been answered. Mrs Anne Gillison had given a further hospital for eight maiden ladies. On the moor above the town, too, a new poorhouse replaced an older and far from satisfactory one.

The erection of the new steeple at the Priory Church was accompanied by the building of additional churches in the town now fast growing at the foot of the hill. St John's Church, as lovely a piece of Georgian work as can be found in the county, was finished in 1754, and St Ann's Church was erected towards the close of the century. Nonconformist chapels were also built, and in 1798 Richard Gillow presented land for the building of a

Roman Catholic church behind the former priests' house in St Leonardgate.

On the civic side, too, Lancaster was developing a stateliness of outline compatible with its growing importance in the affairs of state and commerce. A new Town Hall was built, appropriately enough, in the old market place in 1781-83. Outside was the old cross from whose steps Charles II had once and James III twice been proclaimed kings, as Stuart supporters had marched through the town; near by was the well into which the town's supplies of gunpowder had been thrown as the Jacobite army of 1715 approached the Lune. Neither cross nor well are there today, and the city's business has been transferred to the newer Town Hall in Dalton Square. The Georgian building is used as a museum—a very excellent one, too.

Bridges were erected across the Lune. A new one at Skerton replaced an older one in 1788, and still carries one of the heaviest traffic routes of the country, the A.6 road between London and Glasgow, across the river. The cost was borne by the county authorities and amounted to some £14,000. Nine years later, when the line of the canal was being taken north towards Kendal, John Rennie built an aqueduct over the Lune some distance east of the road bridge. Although the stone was quarried close at hand, the cost is said to have exceeded £45,000. Both bridges, however, were regarded as objects of beauty. Thomas West, whose late eighteenth-century *Guide to the Lakes* is usually regarded as starting a vogue in North Country literature, referred to Skerton Bridge as "one of the handsomest bridges in Europe". John Britton, in his *Beauties of England and Wales*, published in 1808, was even more ecstatic concerning Rennie's aqueduct, and described it as "the most magnificent structure of its kind that has ever been erected in Great Britain, and may fairly vie with any of the pompous works of the Romans".

But more than any public buildings, the houses and residences built at the time reflect the true spirit of Georgian Lancaster. We find them, opposite the modern bus station, in Damside Street and Cable Street, no longer used as residences, but, outwardly at any rate, their elegance remains. To this period, too, belong Queen Street and Dalton Square, and much of Castle Hill and Church Street. It was, indeed, an age in which, as the local historian, Mr M. M. Schofield, so neatly puts it, Lancaster "grew rich without

losing its taste". And, fortunately for us, it is not difficult to find ample evidence of that taste as we walk through Lancaster's streets.

The first part of the nineteenth century brought sweeping changes. The Dukes of Hamilton were residing at Ashton Hall, on the road to Pilling, and entertained lavishly. Their house parties took their full share in the social activities of Lancaster. They attended the county balls held in the old Assembly Rooms; they supported the race meetings held on Lancaster Moor. What might be termed the "Hamilton" influence carried on the Georgian proprieties of Lancaster even when many of the merchants had departed elsewhere; but in 1853, the eleventh duke, who had married a cousin of the Emperor Napoleon and lived mainly abroad, sold his North Lancashire estates. By then, however, little had been seen of the family in the district for some years, and their influence on the town's affairs greatly waned.

From the sea, Lancaster turned to cotton. The construction of the canal gave an impetus to the new trade, and the first cotton mill was built on the banks of the newly constructed waterway. The 1820s saw cotton manufacturing established as the premier industry of the town, and several new factories were built. These stuck closely to the line of the canal which, fortunately, passed through the outskirts of the town and so kept industry away from the Georgian centre.

Lancaster's preoccupation with cotton, however, was of much shorter duration than its concern with shipping. The approach of the "Hungry Forties" saw trade receding; and, of course, the distance separating the town from the exchanges at Manchester and Liverpool told its tale. Lancaster ceased to be directly concerned with the production of cotton, but the mills remained and a population which had grown rapidly since the advent of the nineteenth century had to be fed.

Luckily, the collapse of the cotton industry was not one of dramatic suddenness. There was a steady deterioration of the position over a couple of decades, and gradually the mills were turned over to other work. Silk manufacturing was established, and still remains an important industry in the city; but of much more consequence was the development of the making of leather cloth and table baize which brought into prominence the two families whose firms have continued to dominate the industrial life of Lancaster for over a hundred years—Williamsons and Storeys.

James Williamson came of manufacturing stock. His father was in the woollen business at Keswick, but the son came to Lancaster as an apprentice in painting and decorating. Indeed, it was while following this trade that he was admitted to the Freeman's Roll. At first he manufactured table baize as a side-line, but before long he had not only taken over some of the former cotton mills but also some shipbuilding yards beside the Lune. Here the Lune Mills, which are now famous throughout the world for the manufacture of oilcloth and linoleum, were established in 1844, and now cover an area of over fifty acres of factory space alone and employ some 3,500 people.

The Williamson family have also been great benefactors to the city of Lancaster. In 1878 the founder of the firm gave the lovely parklands which bear his name on the moor above the town, and which were formerly the site of some stone quarries. He also contributed largely to the Royal Lancaster Infirmary. His son, who became Lord Ashton and who has been mentioned in connexion with St Annes, presented the Williamson Memorial, which stands in the park and is a landmark for miles around, the present Town Hall, and the Lune Bank Gardens, along the north side of the River Lune.

The Storeys, too, originated beyond the northern boundary of Lancashire—in neighbouring Westmorland. An interesting feature is that not only was William Storey also apprenticed to the painting trade but he was with the same firm as James Williamson. Later, after starting business on his own account, he was joined by his brother, Thomas, who had been engaged in a secretarial post with the North Western Railway Company, and they, too, became interested in the manufacturing of table baize. Now "Storeys of Lancaster" have three mills in the city and surrounding district, carrying on similar work to that at Lune Mills.

The name of the family is perpetuated by the Storey Institute, which houses the local technical college and the Art Gallery, and was presented by Sir Thomas Storey in 1887 and extended by his son, Herbert L. Storey. Sir Thomas also presented a home to the Royal Albert Hospital, on the outskirts of the city, and his son gave the workshops some years afterwards.

Lancaster has, indeed, been fortunate in the fact that the two families who have contributed largely to its industrial prosperity have also been among its greatest benefactors.

CHAPTER VI

MORECAMBE AND MORECAMBE BAY

I

BEYOND the Lune at Skerton Bridge the great rush of traffic that pours along the great A.6 trunk road divides. The major portion goes north to the Lake District, to the detached Furness Peninsula of Lancashire and to Carlisle and the Scottish Border; the remainder turns left to the modern seaside resort of Morecambe, third of the big Lancashire holiday towns. But whether one continues up the main road or turns to Morecambe itself, there is no escaping the influence of Morecambe Bay, that ever-beautiful bight on the western coast.

The traveller journeying to Barrow-in-Furness and other towns and villages in that Lancashire that lies north of the sands may have occasion for annoyance at a bay which causes him to make a wide detour in order to use the bridges across the Rivers Kent and Leven. But no one can deny the sheer loveliness of both bay and setting, whether seen from the promenade at Morecambe or from one of the minor eminences on the A.6 road between Lancaster and Carnforth.

Sometimes the bay presents itself as a wide, almost featureless, expanse of sand. On other occasions the tide will be in and the murmuring waves lap lazily against the concrete bastion of Morecambe's promenade or the edge of the mud flats further to the east. Lazily is, I think, the right word; rarely do the waves of Morecambe Bay hurl themselves into a frenzy.

On the other hand, there is no disputing the resoluteness of the incoming tide. The gentle ebb-and-flow action, so familiar elsewhere, seems to be absent here. The tide advances steadily, with a constant gnawing action, steadfast and determined. Once having started its course, it seems as though there can be no turning back. It is a fascinating spectacle to watch. And the speed with which shallow channels get deeper and banks of sand are turned into islands before being themselves submerged has a certain grim warning about it. The retreat is carried out in the same decisive fashion.

Really high tides bring a wave of some height sweeping across the sands, not unlike a replica of the more famous Severn bore.

It is not, however, the stretching sands or the sea that constitute the real charm of the bay. Your eye will rove far beyond them to the circumventing line of green hills enclosing the bight of sand and sea, the green hills of Lonsdale, of Westmorland, and the Furness Peninsula. Beyond the Furness hills are the mountains of the Lake District, with the entire Conistoun Old Man range, the very roof of Lancashire, forming an arresting background. The eye roves east, still following the crest of the rim, to Helvellyn, to the moorish uplands of Shap, and, when the horizon sweeps south, to flat-topped Ingleborough and the more urbane Pennine. And only when you turn your back on the sea and look south in the direction of Lancaster do you find, beyond the city, the end of the mountain rim marked by Clougha Pike, outlying spur of the heights of Bowland Forest, a couchant lion over the entrance to the valley of the Lune.

Such then is Morecambe Bay's setting. Green hills rising to mountain or moorland heights on three sides; the Irish Sea forming the fourth. And that setting, between sea and mountain, encloses a succession of villages lovely as any in the land. On the verge of the bay, time was when the villages were mainly occupied by fisherfolk. Now, at least as far as the southern side of the bay is concerned, populations are changing. Some, easy of approach from Lancaster and even places farther afield, accommodate the workers in office, factory, and shop; others, not so ready of approach by either road or rail, have attracted the retired business folk of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Fortunately, in the majority of cases where time has brought changes, the real cores of the older villages have been left intact.

The greatest changes have, of course, taken place in the Morecambe area itself. The former village of Poulton, once relying almost entirely on its links with fishing, has been expanded and finally submerged in the developing town that has taken its name from that of the bay. Two neighbouring villages, Heysham to the west and Bare to the east, have shared a like fate. In both these places, extending suburbia of Morecambe have enclosed collections of white-washed cottages which still stand, in defiance of the new age, as evidence of the stalwart race of fisherfolk that frequented these parts.

How long they will remain is, of course, another matter. Those at Bare do cause one of the main traffic routes to the promenade to deviate from that straight course which seems to be the ideal of every coastal town planner hereabouts. Doubtless the time will come when some over-zealous councillor will advocate for their demolition in the interests of progress, that much-maligned word that so often on the Lancashire as indeed on any other holiday coast has been commensurate with the desire for quick profits and financial gain. This, I know full well, has been an area of rapid growth and speedy development, and the speed has often outstripped both the common and the æsthetic senses. It would be well to remember the rock from which so many Lancashire families were hewn. To some the presence of a row of old cottages may be no more than a nuisance; to others, they are merely a quaint survival; but to more they are a reflection of that rock . . .

Even the beauty of the bay has not been without threats of attention from the "improvers". There have been suggestions that a great dam should be flung across from Fleetwood to Barrow-in-Furness and a road made across it. An M.P. is said to have given enthusiastic support to the scheme. M.P.'s are, of course, paid to talk . . .

More modest, but with the same disregard of beauty, have been the suggestions that the curve of the bay nearest Morecambe should be reclaimed, and that ornamental gardens be placed off the promenade. Some even quote Southport's success in that respect as an example. They forget that Southport's tides left voluntarily and that the local authorities there would more than welcome their return.

There was an attempt at Morecambe a few years back to pump sand from the middle of the bay and cover a stretch of pebbles and shingles on a popular section of the beach. Ancient Morecambe, in the form of the fisherfolk whose ancestors have been there for several generations and who know more about the peculiar intricacies of the tides than anyone else, said it could not be done; modern Morecambe—the improvers and so on—said it could, and spent a deal of money before finding that the fisherfolk were right. The deposited sand disappeared after the first few high tides.

It is indeed fortunate for Morecambe that the majority of

schemes aimed at altering the appearance of the bay have so far proved prohibitive, either on account of cost or impracticability. The beauty of Morecambe Bay is one of the assets of the north of England. Its presence places Morecambe on a different level from the other resorts. Southport was built on sand—and a good job was made of the building, too; Blackpool has by sheer enterprise and the knack of being one jump ahead of its competitors raised itself into a home of entertainment and conviviality unlike anything else in the whole country. Neither can vie with Morecambe for excellence of setting. Whether Morecambe itself has always appreciated that is another story. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a changed bay would leave Morecambe a much poorer place. Natural beauty is far from bountiful along the coast of Holiday Lancashire.

Indeed, were I to assume a role of romantic publicist for Morecambe and its bay, I would call this section of Lancashire's shoreline the "sunset coast". I know few spots where sunsets take on a greater splendour. The surrounding hills robe themselves in burnished gold and in purple. Across the bay a stack of black chimneys at Barrow-in-Furness, silhouetted against a colourful sky, puff smoke gently upwards. And one turns towards the sandy floor of the bay itself to watch little runnels, quiet pools, and even wet patches of ooze turn from pale blue to pale gold, and then to red; sometimes a fiery, almost an angry red, as though the great furnaces of Barrow-in-Furness were sending liquid streams of molten iron across the tide.

The sun goes down beyond the western rim. The fiery splendour hangs apace and then gives way to darker shades as the hills grow darker in outline and the line between mountain-top and sky gets blurred. The lights of Morecambe are turned on—the lights of cinema and concert room and dance hall. There are other lights among the foothills, this time the lights of fishermen's cottages and country inn and farmstead.

Night, indeed, reveals two worlds that by day seemed indivisible. The one is Morecambe itself, that now seems almost divorced from its bay; the other is made up of the villages and hamlets to which the bay gives permanence and character.

Sinus Moricambe, the Romans called the bay; and it may well be that the real name is older still, for the Celtic word for sea still survives in the Welsh word *mor*. There is, however, another Moricambe Bay farther north, an inlet of the Solway Firth in the vicinity of Silloth, and Roman records are apt to be somewhat confusing as the result.

Camden, the great chronicler of Tudor times, seems to have been in little doubt of the real derivation. In his *Britannia*, 1586, he describes how the shore "bends in a winding and crooked bay, which therefore seems to be the Moricambe that Ptolemy fixes hereabouts; such agreement there is between the nature of the place and its name; for this estuary is crooked and Moricambe signifies in British, a crooked sea."

That the Romans knew Morecambe Bay—I use the modern spelling—is put beyond all doubt if we accept the story that Agricola had the service of hired guides "when he proceeded across the bay of Moricambe into Foreness", and so succeeded in outflanking an ambush that had been prepared by the Brigantine occupiers of this section of northern England.

I am not suggesting that the Morecambe Bay of that time would be quite like that of today. Indeed, we have been reminded by Mr S. O'Dwyer, an authority on Roman ways and routes, that the probable coastline would roughly follow the present course of the five-fathom line. A glance at a map makes the position clear, and shows precious little sea between Morecambe and the Furness shore. Even so, there must have been considerable areas of swamp and coastal marsh, and the Rivers Keer, Kent, and Leven would have been tidal about their estuaries.

It seems well within the bounds of probability that Agricola, astute general as we know him to have been, would have the service of those hired guides. In saying that I quote, as added weight to the argument, John Fell, the Ulverston antiquary whose writings find much support in North Lancashire, as saying: "It may be that when Agricola conceived his march from Lancaster for the conquest of North-west Britain a portion of his forces advancing by the coast road was guarded over Morecambe Bay by natives accustomed to its tides and fords."

Perhaps we are on ground somewhat as sticky and shifting as

the quicksands that gave the bay an unsavoury reputation among those travellers who later followed the Roman lead. It is as well to pass on apace.

The Scots came in the early fourteenth century, that unhappy period for northern England that followed Edward II's defeat at Bannockburn. With the Bruce himself in charge, the invaders plundered much of western Cumberland, but on crossing the Duddon sands into Lancashire were "bought off" by the Abbot of Furness, whose lands had suffered in an earlier incursion and who was determined not to have a repetition. His action seems to have met with but partial success, for the *Lanercost Chronicle* laconically relates that: "Notwithstanding, the Scots set fire to several places and lifted spoil." And, the *Chronicle* continues, having plundered Cartmel, "they crossed the sands of Kent, as far as the town of Lancaster".

The sands certainly seemed firm enough to afford the Scots a crossing, but others seem to have been less fortunate. Lives were being lost hereabouts, and the Abbot of Furness seemed somewhat perturbed about it all. His possessions in the Lancaster area could only be reached by making the crossing of the sands, and doubtless many of his own retainers were among those who succumbed to the dangers of quicksand and tide.

Yet, deep as was the abbot's concern, it was, it is to be feared, more connected with the establishment of the cause of disaster rather than any attempt at prevention. He petitioned Edward II for the establishment of a coroner to act in these parts, and, as the outcome of an inquiry held at Lancaster in March, 1326—only four years after the Bruce had passed that way—such an office was instituted. Eleven years later Edward III confirmed the appointment, a portion of the charter reading: "By reason of the violence and strength of the current at the ebb and flow of the tide, many people in crossing the sands between Furness and the adjacent parts had before that time been exposed to peril, upon whose bodies the office of Coroner had not been hitherto duly executed, because the Coroners dwelt in distant parts", the reasoning of which seems, to me, remarkably obscure.

Doubtless, the coroner executed his duties with all due care and attention; doubtless, too, the toll of life continued much the same as before. And in the end much more practical measures seem to have been taken by the priors of the lesser monastic establishments

of Conishead, near Ulverston, and Cartmel, both of whom were so often compelled to occupy roles that were merely subservient to their more powerful neighbour of Furness, when they instituted guides—carters, they were called in the early days—to conduct travellers across the sands. Conishead was responsible for the provision of one for the Leven estuary, between Ulverston and Flookburgh, and Cartmel for the one between what is now Grange-over-Sands and Hest Bank, a few miles north of Lancaster. The latter was the longer crossing; the former the more dangerous.

It is strange that while we know so much about the appointment of the coroner, the dates when the guides came into being appear unrecorded. Most authorities put the time as in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Certain it is, however, that they were there before Henry VIII brought about the downfall of the monastic system, when, as among the "lesser monasteries", both Conishead and Cartmel were abolished before nearby Furness. In the year 1501 there was a dispute concerning lands at Cartmel in the tenancy of the priory, and it was stated that a man named Edmondson held the office of "Carter upon Kent Sands".

We have more definite information in the *Velor Ecclesiasticus*, a record of the various "Spiritualities and Temporalities" of the dissolved monasteries in 1535, where William Gate is described as "bailiff and guide of the whole people of the Lord the King by the sands of the sea called Cartmel sands", and John Hartley held a similar appointment for the Leven sands under the prior of Conishead.

After the Dissolution, the responsibility for the maintenance of the guides passed to the Duchy of Lancaster, with three local trustees making the actual appointment, and, more than four hundred years after, the two offices are still maintained. Since 1869, however, payment of the guides' salaries has been controlled by the Charity Commissioners, but the money still comes from the revenues of the Duchy.

The present-day duties are, naturally, far from onerous, but during the summer months the Kent Sands crossing between Hest Bank and Grange-over-Sands is often made by organised parties of ramblers and private individuals. Provided the tide-table is consulted before setting out, the excursion is not only interesting but safe. On the whole, the sands at low tide are reasonably firm, and

whatever quicksands still exist in the bay are usually well away from the recognised route.

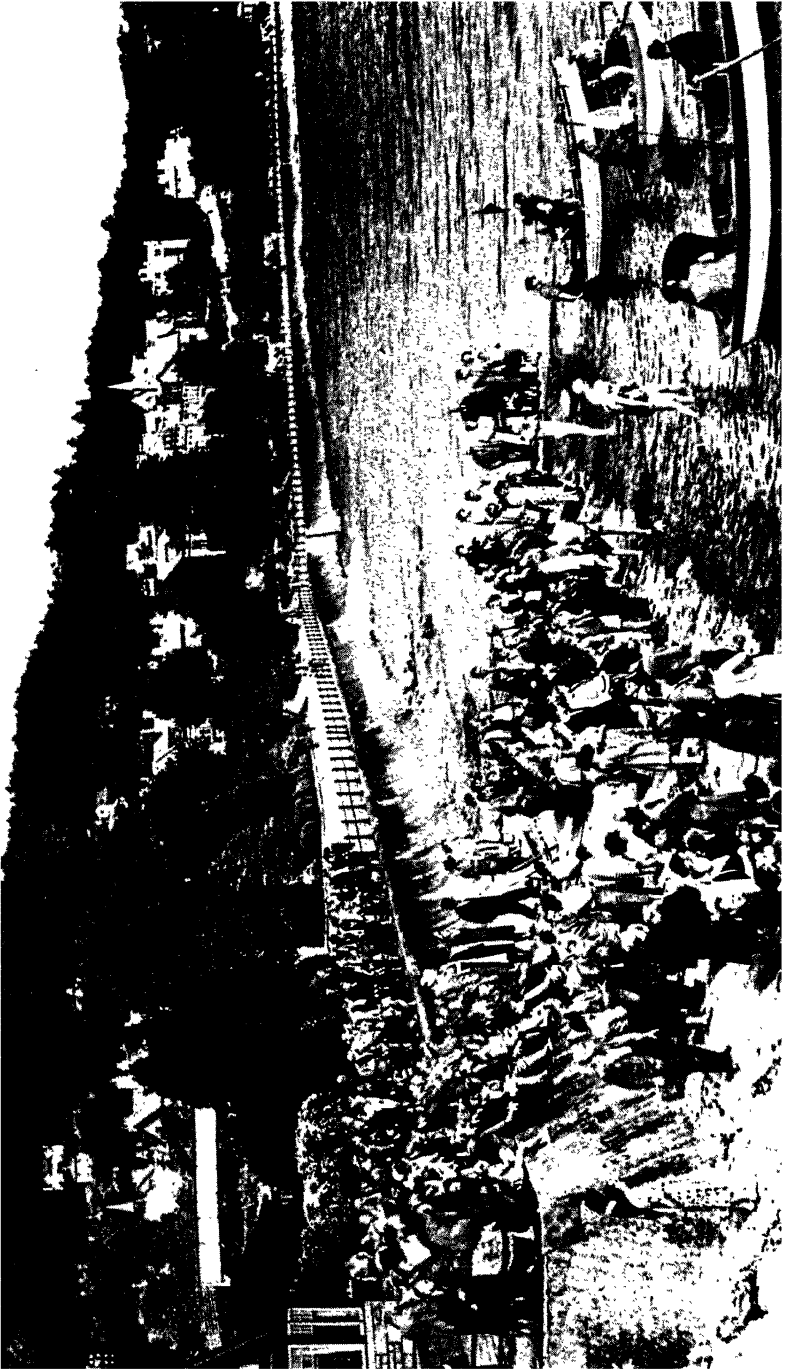
Undoubtedly the greatest authority on the crossing is the local historian, Mr T. Pape, of Hest Bank, who has written an admirable little book on *The Sands of Morecambe Bay*; and, during the war years when the then guide was away on army service, himself took over the responsibility of guiding parties across the first of the fords on the Hest Bank side, that of the Keer. Mr Pape is emphatic that, in the summer months, between three and a half and four hours should be allowed to elapse after high tide before setting out on the northward route. Then the Keer channel will be sufficiently shallow to allow fording it an easy matter, although it may still be necessary to make use of the guide's boat to get across the Kent at the conclusion of the nine miles' walk. In all events, the guide, who lives in Carter Lane, Kent's Bank, Grange-over-Sands, should be notified of estimated times, and he will, of course, be ready to meet the party as the Kent channel is neared.

From the railway station at Hest Bank the sands are crossed in a north-westerly direction, leaving the low headland of Red Bank (near to which the Quaker, William Stout, was born) away to the right, and making for a group of boulders—the only one in this part of the bay—known as Priest's Skeer. From a distance the boulders invariably look like a small flock of sheep. Within living memory, many of the stones have disappeared as the result of the accumulation of sand, and it may well be that in the course of years Priest's Skeer will disappear entirely. The name comes from the fact that it lay on the route used regularly by the retainers of Furness Abbey on their way to and from their fishery in the Lune.

A clear day—and I would not recommend the crossing to be made in other conditions—and Grange-over-Sands is quite visible. The route is directly ahead. The first channel, that of the Keer, is subject to a certain amount of variation, but usually it will be found within a mile or so of Priest's Skeer. Fording it presents no difficulty.

The sands now are quite firm, and one has every opportunity of endorsing the opinion of William Wordsworth, who, according to a letter written by Mrs Hemans, the poet, to one of her friends, regarded crossing the sands not "as a deed of derring-do, but as a decided proof of taste".





The views are, indeed, magnificent. Immediately behind Grange-over-Sands is a well-wooded ridge, which eventually culminates at Humphrey Head, Lancashire's highest cliff, and where, according to local legend, the last wolf in England was slain—a claim, by the way, not substantiated by any known facts. Farther behind are the monarchs of the Lakeland mountains, stretching eastwards to the rolling heights around Shap and the Pennines. No wonder, to quote Mrs Hemans again: "The Lake scenery is never seen to such advantage as after the passage of what he calls its majestic barrier."

Looking backwards, the view is of the outline of the hills of Bowland Forest, with anvil-topped Ingleborough rising nobly from the neighbouring Pennine heights in the distance.

The Kent has a habit of forming a series of channels through the sands, with the main one, naturally, as the deepest. Here, of course, one must be prepared for a deal of wading and, very probably, the use of the guide's boat for the deepest. I have made the crossing of this by horse and cart. Always, however, the feeling is the same. What seems a very short crossing on approach takes longer to accomplish than one anticipates. After a spell of heavy rain, the swollen Kent, which is an extremely rapid river, often tears out great holes in the sand, sometimes ten to fifteen feet deep, and it is then that the guide's knowledge of the really firm places for the crossing is imperative to safety.

Today the crossing of Morecambe Bay is made by travellers in search of pleasure, and one is apt to forget that in the days before the road from Lancaster to Cartmel and Furness by way of Levens Bridge was made and a railway viaduct across the Kent estuary between Arnside and Grange constructed, the only way of passing between the two detached portions of Lancashire was by the sands route. That tragedies all too often occurred—despite the guides (and the coroner!)—is borne out by the numerous references in the records of Cartmel Priory and the registers of the various parishes around the bay.

The guides mainly applied themselves to their tasks diligently and well, but, inevitably, there were exceptions. Among the latter was Thomas Hodgson, who followed Gate soon after the Duchy had taken over the supervision, for a report of the Charity Commissioners says, "he seems to have been a drunkard and a gambler, and to have been indicted for allowing travellers to drown before

his eyes". In 1873, too, the Kent sands guide was dismissed from office on a charge of intemperance.

The family with the longest record of service was that of the Carters, who doubtless took their name originally from their appointment. Richard Carter succeeded Hodgson about the middle of the sixteenth century, and his descendants continued in office until 1867. There were Carters as guides during the stirring times of the quarrels between king and Parliament, and, equally important locally, in those Commonwealth and Reformation years when the Quakers were making converts about the bay and suffering persecution and terms of imprisonment in Lancaster Castle. Carters were in office when the coaching traffic across the sands reached the zenith of its activity and the guide's duties became more onerous. And the last of the Carters to serve as guide was there when the railway viaduct between Arnside and Grange was opened, and with that opening the cross-bay traffic shrunk to a mere tithe of its former importance. The three centuries of the Carter occupancy of the guide's house at Kents Bank covers all that is really important in the historical story of the old route.

One, John Carter, lost his life in attempting to save travellers from drowning. Twenty years later, in 1715, his son, another John, petitioned the Duchy for an increase in the original salary of £5 a year, pointing out that "he has to keep two horses summer and winter, and being necessitated to attend the *edy*, four miles upon the sands, twelve hours in the twenty-four, his horses thereby and by often passing the waters are starved with cold and often thrown into distempers." Of himself it was stated that he "undergoes great hardships, by his being exposed to the winds and cold upon the plain sands and he, by seeking out new fords, every variation of the *edy* and upon happenings of fogs and mists, is often put in danger of his life". His salary was increased to £12.

References to the sands' crossing appear quite frequently in the journal of George Fox, and, indeed, the sands played a part in one of the most momentous occasions of his life, the commencement of his friendship with Judge and Margaret Fell, of Swarthmoor Hall, at Ulverston.

It was in the year 1652 when George Fox, then a young man of barely twenty-eight, came into Furness on a preaching tour, and, as was the custom of pioneers of the Quaker

movement, interrupted the normal course of service in Ulverston Parish Church. There was the natural uproar, but Margaret Fell, who had previously been impressed by the piety of the young Quaker, intervened on his behalf and asked that he should be allowed to speak. The congregation, however, became hostile and Fox, whose tour at this stage had been marked by alternate scenes of enthusiasm for his cause and of violent displeasure, was taken back to Swarthmoor.

Judge Fell himself was returning across the sands from Lancaster Assizes when he was met, near the Ulverston shore after the final crossing of the Leven sands, by local riders who told him that his wife was harbouring "the preacher man" and, moreover, that she was "bewitched" by him and was lost!

Thomas Fell had always a rare reputation for fairness, and, although doubtless displeased over an incident that might have unsavoury effects, he wisely refrained from making any judgment until he sorted the matter out. His wife's entreaty that he himself should talk to the visitor prepared the way for an interview between the judge and Fox that turned out momentous in the story of the Quaker movement.

Although Judge Fell never became a Quaker, his wife and family supported the new cause—and, of course, his wife later became Margaret Fox. The upshot of that interview was that his house at Swarthmoor became the meeting place for the Quakers of North Lancashire, and the judge continued to attend service in Ulverston Church alone until the end of his life, six years later.

From that initial meeting with the Fells, George Fox continued to visit Swarthmoor Hall on many an occasion, and, often enough, used the sands' crossing. Once, he relates in his diary:

"I went to see Justice West, and Richard Hubberthorne went with me; and wee ridd uppe ye sands where never noe man ridde before, a very dangerous place, and swimmied over ye water not knowing ye way nor ye danger of ye sands: and came to West's house. And when we were come in he said to us: Did you not see two men rideing over ye sands? I shall have their cloathes anon for I am ye Crowner."

For this crossing, Fox earned a reputation of being a wizard, for "neither water could drowne me nor could they draw bloode of mee".

In 1660, two years after Judge Fell had died, Fox was arrested at Swarthmoor Hall on the charge of heresy, and, in custody of an armed guard, was conveyed across the sands for trial in Lancaster Castle. Guiding the party across the fords and channels was Thomas Carter. Fox describes him as a "wilful, wicked man," and goes on to relate how he clapped his hook in the cloak of one of the Quaker members of the party "and drew him away from his friends near 100 yards so that he was strangled and drowned."

It must not be presumed, however, that the guides were forced to live on the salary provided by the Duchy. In addition they expected—and usually obtained—a sum of money from those they conducted across the sands. Some travellers, naturally, attempted to avoid this payment by making the journey without the guide's aid, and it is most likely that the majority of the casualties occurred in this way. Stout mentions one such instance in his autobiography. "Sometime this year (1687)," he writes, "Christopher Harrys, a draper and grocer of Cartmel, of great business but very pecunious, who frequented our market at Lancaster, and, usually, to save the charge of carriage, brought one or more horses to carry his goods; but in crossing the sands some horse faltered and cast his loading, which, he endeavouring to put to rights, was so long that the flood came and he was drowned, notwithstanding several came by and saw him, but he would not call for assistance; otherwise he might have saved his goods and life."

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the rapid development of the coach trade across the sands, with the resultant increase in the guide's responsibilities. In 1820 the Kent sands guide's salary was increased to £32 per annum, but out of this he had to pay an assistant who was responsible for the crossing of the Keer, on the Hest Bank side of the bay.

The regular mail and passenger services, which, of course, made the crossings at fixed times, were usually accompanied by the guides who frequently tested the sands for firmness by prodding with long poles. Mr Pape, in his book already referred to, gives a picturesque account of the final stages:

"When the guide had safely brought his coach across the Kent channels, which varied in number very considerably at intervals of only a few days, he would come up to the coach and

stick his sheepskin cap inside. Then having received due recognition of his services he would ride back across the fords to escort other travellers coming either on foot or on horseback."

Both guides, too, made use of a method known as "brobbing" to indicate the best approach to the channel fords. This consisted of placing little branches of trees at frequent intervals in the sand.

Always, however, there were reckless coachmen who refused to accept the warnings of the guides. Such was Mark Leadbetter, who was in charge of the *Whitehaven Belle*, which made weekly journeys between the Cumberland coastal town and Lancaster, taking three days on both outward and homeward route. March 3rd, 1817, was wild and stormy, and the difficulty experienced in getting across the Leven sands between Ulverston and Flookbrough should have been sufficient to induce the driver to accept the warnings of the Kent sands guide against making the longer crossing.

Leadbetter, however, went forward, but in the middle of a deep channel well out in the bay his coach was overturned by the strong wind, and the passengers flung into the water. With difficulty he released two of the horses; the remaining two were drowned.

Fortunately, the passengers—eight in number—all succeeded in struggling to firmer sand, and three hours after the accident reached the south side of the bay at Bolton-le-Sands. Next day the coach was found, with the two dead horses still in the shafts. They were cut free and the tide floated their bodies up at Grange. The coach was too firmly embedded to make salvage work a possibility.

Nearly five years later, in December, 1821, the *Westmorland Flower*, carrying His Majesty's mail, as well as a compliment of nine passengers, from Ulverston to Lancaster, met with like disaster. The driver, John Fowler, was one of the most experienced in the service across the bay, and after driving snow had buffeted the coach as it crossed the Leven he contemplated giving up the journey. The Kent sands guide was already out on the sands. Fowler was not at all anxious to follow. It was only the thought of the mail that urged him to risk the crossing.

The snowstorm increased in fury, thick mists blotted out all

familiar landmarks, and the surface of the sand got stickier. Eventually the coach came to a halt in the mud, and neither horses nor passengers could budge it. The passengers decided to complete the journey on foot; Fowler remained behind to release his horses. He was never seen again.

In such conditions, the sands of Morecambe Bay are perilous indeed. Even the guide had abandoned the crossing and had taken his own party back to Grange, not without a deal of difficulty. With nothing to direct them, it is not to be wondered at that arguments arose as to the correct direction among the stranded coach passengers, and the party split. One section, more by good fortune than anything else, managed to get ashore at Warton three hours after leaving the coach. They had wandered well to the east of the direct route and had never crossed the Keer.

The others, finding themselves completely lost, decided to try retracing their steps to the coach. To be lost on a mountain slope on a day of thick mist is hopeless enough, as I know to my own cost, but at least there is the fall of land to give some rough direction of the way down. To be lost on a wide expanse of sand, with whirling snow and thick mist blanketing out every landmark, is far worse. To find that coach was a hopeless task from the first, and, after the manner of lost parties, the unfortunate passengers began to work in wide circles. On one they hit the Keer, and, the water being low, managed to cross it. Eventually they, too, came ashore at Bolton-le-Sands.

Next morning the team of horses was off the coast at Bare, and a search party located the coach. Again it proved impossible to move the vehicle from the sand, but someone had the idea of fixing empty beer barrels under the coach body. The device worked, and was used again on subsequent occasions. Another tide and it had been lifted free of much of the vice-like grip of wet sand. It was salvaged and eventually put back into service—but, according to Mr W. Travers Jackson, who has collected many of these old stories of the sands, under another name.

It would seem that the early coaches were too heavy, and after a time lighter vehicles were introduced for the oversands route. Yet, even so, accidents were not entirely checked. Always there were those who were foolhardy enough to disobey the injunctions of the guides. Sometimes they got through; sometimes they failed. The *Lancaster Gazette* of a century ago contained many accounts of

accidents and delays to vehicles crossing the sands of Morecambe Bay. No wonder that one coach owner, eager to attract customers and at the same time convince them of the reliability of his driver, inserted the following advertisement in the columns of the *Gazette*:

“A diligence or chaise which will carry three persons conveniently will set out from Mr Stanley Turner’s *The Sun Inn* in Lancaster every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, as the tide will permit, to Ulverston, over the sands, which is the nearest and direct road to Whitehaven . . . each passenger to pay five shillings on taking a place for Ulverston at Lancaster. The proprietors assure the public that they have secured a sober and careful driver, who is well acquainted with the sands, and humbly hope their plan will meet with due encouragement, as this is the most cheap, safe, and expeditious way of crossing the sands of Ulverston.”

Not all stories of the coach crossings, however, are connected with tragedy. The late Hal Jukes, well known as a broadcaster, was fond of the tale of how the coachman’s horn froze during one wintry journey and was then placed on a table while the company regaled themselves with hot drinks after the completion of the crossing. The horn began to thaw and, without any warning, sent out a long low note that just terrified the astonished assembly!

Even the construction of the turnpike road by way of Levens Bridge in 1820 did not place the oversands way out of regular use. Travellers using the turnpike were, of course, subject to a deal of annoyance in the form of tolls. The sands route was free to all and, in addition, much shorter. Saving of time and money seems to have heavily outweighed its hazards and dangers.

The abolition of tolls and the construction of the railway line from Carnforth to Barrow-in-Furness contrived to bring to an end the cross-bay traffic. But the guides are kept up. An accident to the viaduct spanning the Kent may even yet bring a knowledge of local tides and fords into first-class importance. Morecambe Bay may well be proud of its unique institution.

Not all the accounts of tragedies on the sands of Morecambe Bay, however, refer to travellers making the crossing between Lancaster and the northern shore. For centuries the inshore fishermen living in the villages round the bay have wrested a livelihood from the cockle beds and the various channels with their shrimps and flukes, and there have been times when they, hardy and weatherwise though they are, have succumbed to the treacherous currents and fast incoming tides.

When Thomas Gray came north in 1772, he visited Poulton-le-Sands, the forerunner of the modern resort of Morecambe itself, and found some of the local fisherfolk mending their nets on the shingle beach. From them he heard the story of the most recent tragedy concerning one of their number. Again the old bogey of the sands, thick mist, had been responsible. Father, mother, and two daughters were returning from the fishing-grounds. The former, looking for a safe way across the channels, had been drowned, and his wife had perished in looking for him. Only the horse, with the uncanny sense of direction that comes often to these animals had brought the daughters back to the shore in safety.

Gray wrote at length about the tragedy, but there were others, recorded only in the local newspapers and in much briefer terms. "A poor woman named Ellen Speight, while employed in getting mussels on Heysham Sands, was surrounded by the tide and drowned", reported the *Lancaster Gazette* of 19th November, 1829. A later record, for 16th March, 1843, reads:

"Three men named William Woods, James Dickinson, and John Woof, all of Bolton-le-Sands, while engaged in shrimping, were overtaken by the tide and drowned. They were all married men, and a subscription was set on foot for their widows and seventeen children."

Such tragedies inevitably caused distress, but the work of harvesting the sands went on. Less than a century ago more than 150 fisherfolk were engaged, and Flookburgh alone had a turnover of something like 3,000 tons of cockles a year. Always, however, there was an uncertainty attached to the work. There were good seasons and equally disappointing ones. Men turned to other

employment, but there are always those to whom the call of the sands is too strong to be put aside. There are still some fifty or so men who continue to "follow the sands" of Morecambe Bay.

Before the railway crossed from Arnside, the shellfish gathered on the Furness side were brought across by horse and cart to Hest Bank, where they were placed on boats and taken down the canal to the Lancashire towns. Today, of course, there is no need for the journey. Most of those taken by the Flookburgh fishermen are sent by road or rail to Lytham, where there is a plant for processing cockles. Others, of course, are sterilised by boiling at home.

On the south side, most of the cockles and shrimps taken by the Morecambe and Bolton-le-Sands fishermen still find their way to Hest Bank. Daily the platform of the little railway station has its piles of baskets and boxes of shrimps and shellfish destined for the towns of Lancashire.

Low tide, too, often results in the sight of the fishermen going to their cockling grounds by horse and cart. It is the traditional method of progress. Most of the horses used are of the larger types. And because of the use of horses this is one of the districts where the blacksmith still finds work to do. To follow the sands, a horse needs to be well shod, otherwise the wet sand will soon draw blood.

From the villages to the fishing grounds is rarely less than a couple of hours' journey. First there are long stretches of marsh-land, where wild duck and geese feed in winter, and in early summer the sea-pink, or thrift, makes a wonderful carpet; then there are stretches of wet sand and mud and, of course, channels to be crossed before reaching the cockle beds.

To the uninitiated there is no difference between a cockle-bed and the seemingly limitless leagues of sand around, but the shellfish gatherer points to little holes in the sand or to strange patches of moss-like growth. The first, he will explain, are the breathing holes of the cockles; the latter grow in the vicinity of the shellfish at certain times of the year.

Arrived at the bed, out comes a three-pronged hand fork, known as a "craam", an instrument about a foot long, with its prongs curved like the talons of a hawk. Scooping the cockles out with one of these is a laborious job, especially when a sackful must be gathered to make the work profitable at all; but during

the winter months (which are the non-breeding season) the shellfish gatherers are allowed the use of a "jumbo", a wooden contrivance with a large flat bottom and two or three handles, each five feet long. The "jumbo" is bounced up and down on the wet sand and brings the cockles up to the surface. Then one cockler takes the "craam" and scoops away at the shellfish, which seem to fly through the air and, miraculously, all land in a basket! One can only think of an expert playing tiddley-winks.

Morecambe Bay has always had a great reputation for its shrimps, and here again the main harvest is carried out by the horse-and-cart fisherfolk. The channels where the shrimps abound can only be worked when the tide has gone out, and the long journey from the shore and the need for getting back before the channels begin to fill up again cuts down the actual working time considerably.

The usual method is to draw a narrow-meshed net through the water behind the cart. The construction of the net is interesting. It is conical in shape and attached to a wooden frame. The bottom of the frame scours the sand at the foot of the channel, causing the shrimps to leap over it and so get into the net. Sometimes, too, one will see a shrimp fisher pushing a net through the channels, in much the same way as the salmon fishermen do in the mouth of the Lune.

It may seem strange to associate innovations with these shrimpers, who have stuck rigidly to the old ways from one generation to another; but shortly after the war, the late Bob Burrow, a Bolton-le-Sands fisherman, started a new idea in shrimping. He introduced an ex-Army "duk" to the sands. What made the experiment—and a successful one it was, too—unique was the fact that Bob Burrow was one of the oldest fishermen about the bay, which showed that innovations are not always the prerogative of youth.

I had the privilege of going with him on one of his shrimping trips, and was able to compare the new method with the old and see how his idea not only resulted in a great saving of time but also in bigger catches. There was the usual journey from Bolton-le-Sands out into the bay, but instead of the normal two hours the duk took less than a quarter. That saving of time was an important factor. Soon, I found another.

We took off into the sea, running easily through the shallows

where the shrimps abound, and in ten minutes or so hauled in the net. We had got enough to fill half a crate. Burrow decided to try another spot, so off we went across the sand to another channel. This time we had a larger hole. We did two further trips and on one of them the dukw jolted and bounced as it crossed a great hole in the sand, a hole big enough to submerge a horse and cart.

The turn of the tide was the signal for others who were out and using the older way to turn for the shore, but with a dukw we could remain there as long as fishing was possible, watching the other shrimpers depart, and then race across the sands and mud to beat the incoming tide, still reaching the shore ahead of competitors, with a good catch, and time in hand for boiling and packing the shrimps ready for the market!

That dukw is still working the sands, where Mrs Burrow and her son maintain the old tradition. The surprising thing is that other fisherfolk have not followed their lead.

Perhaps the most important of these inshore fisheries is that of taking flukes, those fascinating flat-fish that come out with the tide to feed upon the shellfish and then retire just under the sands. The strange thing about fluke-fishing is that the best catches are usually obtained when the sea is on the rough side.

About the estuaries of the Keer, the Kent, and the Lune one often sees lines of stake-nets placed there to catch the fish as they come in with the tide. Sometimes, too, the fishermen use a drag net, taking one end into mid-channel with the almost ubiquitous horse and cart and with a colleague working the other from the edge of the tide.

A grand set of folk these inshore fishermen of Morecambe Bay. But they still face their dangers of incoming tide, of great holes scooped out in the sand which form deathtraps for horse and cart, and, on occasion, of quicksand. But the greatest hazard is still the mist, which turns the fishing grounds into an illimitable stretch of sand. Only years of experience and a knowledge of every channel will bring the mist-caught traveller to the shore again, alive. That is why the same families have been following the sands for many generations; families like the Burrows and Wilsons of Bolton-le-Sands, the Hartleys of Silverdale, the Bensons and Butlers of Flookburgh, and others.

Let us turn to another way of crossing Morecambe Bay—swimming across.

It was during the summer of 1906 that a group of members of one of the Morecambe swimming clubs crossed from Morecambe to Grange-over-Sands in a sailing boat, and on the journey a discussion arose as to whether it was possible to swim from Grange to Morecambe, a swimming distance of between nine and eleven miles according to the state of the channels and the tide.

Similar discussions had been taking part in local swimming circles for some time, but after what had been no more than a casual outing a meeting was convened, and it was decided to inaugurate a Morecambe Cross-Bay Swimming Championship.

Today, that championship is one of the principal sporting events in Lancashire, and it has been declared that the swim across Morecambe Bay is second only to the crossing of the English Channel for its demands on the stamina and skill of the swimmer. Indeed, Tom Blower, of Nottingham, winner of the championship in 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938, swam the English Channel in both directions, and Miss Brenda Fisher, of Grimsby, Ladies' Cross-Bay champion in 1948, was also successful in making a Channel crossing.

Actually, six swims are now promoted during the summer months. The first five are qualifying tests, and the first man home in each of these, along with the two fastest losers, take part in the championship final in September. In addition there is a ladies' championship, which goes to the lady making the fastest time during the five preliminary heats.

The competitors are taken across the bay from Morecambe to Grange in trawl boats, and on the return journey a pilot boat is allocated to each swimmer. The men in charge of the pilot boats are local fishermen with a thorough knowledge of currents, tides, and the like. Unfortunately there are not as many pilots available today as in previous years, which, of course, means that a limit has to be imposed on the number of participants in each heat.

A start is made from Grange-over-Sands an hour or so before flood tide, so that the competitors have the advantage of the flow as they cross towards Arnside and Gibraltar Point, near Silverdale, and so they get over the main sandbank while there is still plenty

of water. Beyond Gibraltar, the main channels of the Kent and Keer are reached, and the swimmers then work round towards the finishing point at Morecambe. The course follows roughly the direction taken by the old coaches.

Not always, however, do things work out as planned in these cross-bay swims. In July, 1932, Miss V. Anderson, the Glasgow professional swimmer, made an attempt to swim round the peninsula on which Morecambe stands, commencing at Lancaster, going down the Lune estuary, round Sunderland Point and Heys-ham, and so to Morecambe itself. Not being a very fast swimmer, she eventually found herself high and dry on a sandbank, and, turning to some of the officials who were accompanying her by boat, she remarked, "I don't mind attempting to swim your bay, but for goodness sake gi' me some water to swim in!"

The first man to do the cross-bay swim from Grange was the Manchester professional, Professor Stearne, who was engaged by the Cross-Bay Swimming Association to give an exhibition soon after its inauguration. He made the crossing on 13th July, 1907, taking 3 hours 35 minutes 41 seconds over the course. Stearne made another attempt in August, 1931, but on this second occasion retired after being 1 hour 20 minutes in the water.

Shortly after Stearne's successful swim, the first championship swims for amateurs commenced. Eleven entries were received, but the last weeks of the summer of 1907 turned out wet and cold and only two men succeeded in getting across. The first amateur to do so was J. McMahon, of Preston, who did the crossing in 3 hours 15 minutes 17 seconds on 26th August. On 7th September of that same year, Brierly Law, of Chadderton, swam across in 3 hours 4 minutes 15 seconds, a time that gave him the distinction of being the first Morecambe Cross-Bay Swimming champion.

Brierly Law became a familiar figure at the annual competitions, and in all swam across the bay eleven times. He won the championship on six occasions, the last being in 1932, when he was over fifty years of age and a grandfather!

The most successful competitor, however, has been Henry Taylor, also of Chadderton, who has been champion nine times, his first victory being in 1910 and his last in 1926. On 5th September, 1914, he made the crossing in 2 hours 2 minutes 35 seconds, a time that has never been equalled, either before or since. Charles Daly, of Manchester, however, holds the record for the

most successful crossings, having swum the bay twenty-nine times in all and won three championships.

On 5th September, 1910, Miss L. Pickering, of Burnley, was the first lady to participate in the cross-bay swim, but she retired after being in the water for over three hours. Two years later, Miss M. Wensley, of Blackburn, actually swam across, but owing to a strong current she was carried off her course and finished outside the recognised bounds. Her time was 2 hours 20 minutes, and she was awarded a special certificate. In 1913, Miss S. Entwistle, also of Blackburn, became the first ladies' champion, and the next year the title went, deservedly, to Miss Wensley.

Perhaps one of the worst experiences of any competitor was that of Miss Marjorie Simpson, of Bare, Morecambe, who had been ladies' champion in 1929 and 1930, during the 1932 season, when the conditions appear to have been the worst on record. Strong currents swept the pilot boat well out of its course, and it was not until late at night that Miss Simpson reached the Morecambe shore after being in and out of the water for over six hours.

5

The map of Morecambe Bay shows a clearly delineated arc of blue separating the north side from the south, yet even today the cartographers find it difficult to keep pace with the changing conditions hereabouts. Within recent years there has been a gradual, though noticeable, withdrawal of the tide, and an increase in the extent of the salt marshes of the shore.

It follows naturally that such changes cannot take place without the balance of bird life on the shore being materially affected, and within the last half-century Morecambe Bay has become one of the chief winter haunts of wild geese in the north-west, with the grey lag as the predominant species.

Howard Saunders's revised edition of Mitchell's *Birds of Lancashire*, issued in 1892, contains some very interesting references to wild geese on the North Lancashire coast which, in view of the present-day status of the different species, are well worth quoting. We are told:

"The various species of geese are seldom seen on the coasts of Lancashire except at the seasons of migration, and they appear

most frequently in October and March. During hard frosts, however, or after storms at sea, they have been observed in the remaining winter months, and flocks have occasionally been seen flying northward as late as June, and southward as early as September. These flocks usually fly at so great a height that it is impossible to distinguish the species, and there is considerable difference of opinion as to whether the grey-lag or the pink-footed goose is of more common occurrence. The grey-lag goose has been shot many times round Morecambe Bay, and also on the inland reservoirs, and no doubt passes through every winter."

In the same year the Rev H. A. Macpherson's *Vertebrate Fauna of the Lake District* appeared, and in a reference to the grey-lag in Morecambe Bay he describes it as "rare" and of the pink-foot comments: "My present information seems to negative the suggestion that the pink-footed goose is at all abundant in the neighbourhood of that estuary." He refers, however, to the presence of the pink-foot on the Ribble marshes, farther to the south, in quite large numbers. Macpherson also quotes one Edmund Sharpe, of Arncliffe, as saying in 1890: "I never saw geese myself before at the head of the bay. They only come in very hard winters. There is no proper food for them." And then in the following January this same man is said to have shot two white-fronted geese from a mixed flock of ten white-fronted and pink-footed geese.

The arrival of the present century, however, showed a gradual increase in the number of geese wintering on the shores of Morecambe Bay; and although the pink-foot seems to have predominated at first, the winter of 1908-9 saw the white-fronted variety present in large numbers. From then on through the next decade the majority of those shot were white-fronted, with just an occasional pink-foot.

The First World War brought about a change which materially affected the whole status of geese about the bay. Between the limestone escarpment of Warton Crag and the hills around Silverdale, the Leighton beck had swollen to produce a shallow lake, and for a long time this was kept under control by a system of draining. A pumping shed was erected on the shores of the bay, but this was abandoned in the closing part of the war and the lake extended, and a succession of wet pastures surrounded it. In the

1922-23 season the grey-lag appeared in large numbers, and since that time it has been the principal species of the marshes of the bay.

Changes are still taking place hereabouts. Mud is ousting sand on the verge of the bay and providing sustenance for the growth of vegetation. Indeed, within the last few years, places that were composed of sand are now being covered with glass-wort (locally miscalled samphire) and creeping bent-grass, a very nutritious form of vegetation which gives an early bite and provides excellent food for wild geese.

In recent winters the chief haunt has been Meathop Moss, on the north, or Lancashire, side of the Kent estuary; and only spells of severe weather have sent the geese south to the marshes off Silverdale and near Leighton Moss. In *Lakeland Natural History*, published in 1946, by the Carlisle Natural History Society, Mr Tom L. Johnson contributed a paper on "The Grey-Lag Goose in Lakeland", and commented that the birds were often seen at Leighton "in the afternoon, not in the morning, and resorting either to an open sheet of water or three damp meadows at the eastern side of the moss". Since then, whole winters have passed without birds being noticed there; and, recently, when geese have been in the Silverdale area they have usually kept to the open marshes nearer the sea.

Before the last war, Mr Michael Bratby, of the Severn Wildfowl Trust, rented Meathop as a shoot, and Mr Peter Scott regularly shot there as a guest, with the result that the place is often referred to in the latter's *Wild Chorus* and *Morning Flight*. Mr Bratby informed me some time ago that by strictly limiting the number of shooting days in a year the number of geese visiting was increased from about 500 to 1,000, and, although the majority were grey-lags, all the British geese were recorded at one time or another.

Usually the geese are present in their greatest numbers during December and January. From mid-September to the beginning of November is the time when the largest flocks arrive, although gaggles have been seen flying overhead at the end of August. These were probably bound for some of their other haunts beside the Ribble and Dee estuaries, and were most likely composed of pink-feet. The departure seems spread between the middle of January and the end of March.

Weather conditions, however, set up irregular movements,





some concerning quite large numbers, and there is evidence of movement between the Solway (where the majority of grey-lags are now to be found on the Scottish side and the Cumberland marshes seem to have been abandoned) and Morecambe Bay. Usually, severe frost is responsible for these, although human interference can do a deal to promote flights between one marsh and another.

Of the species *branta*, or black geese, the brent goose has been reported from Walney Island and other parts of Morecambe Bay on several occasions, and the barnacle is also seen from time to time. From early times, this last-mentioned species seems to have been known in the vicinity of the bay, although there is some doubt as to the authenticity of many of the earlier records. In his *Ornithology*, 1678, Willughby states that "it frequents the sea-coasts of Lancashire in the winter time"; and in the *Natural History of Lancashire, Cheshire, and the Peak of Derbyshire*, 1700, Dr Leigh describes it as "very common", and includes an illustration which is much more like a gannet than a barnacle goose! Mitchell, in *Birds of Lancashire*, refers to the fact that many were shot in 1878 and 1879 round the shores of Morecambe Bay.

The old superstition that barnacle geese hatched from some marine shell rather than the orthodox egg has a special interest, as Piel Island, or the Pile of Foudrey, off the Furness shore between Barrow and Ulverston, was believed to have been a favourite spot for their propagation. In his *Herball*, published in 1587, John Gerarde tells us:

"There is a small island in Lancashire called the Pile of Foulders, wherein are found the broken pieces of old and burried ships, some whereof have been cast thither by shipwracks, and also the bodies with the branches of old and rotten trees, cast up there likewise; whereon is found a certain spume or froth that in time breedeth into certain shells, in shape like those of the Muskle, but sharper-pointed, and of a whitish colour; wherein is contained a thing in form like a lace of silke finely woven as it were together, of a witish colour, one end whereof is fastened unto the inside of the shell, even as the fish of Oisters and Muskles are; the other end is made fast unto the belly or rude passe of lumpe, which in time cometh to the shape and forme of a Bird; when it is perfectly formed the shell gapeth

open, and the first thing that appeareth is the aforesaid lace or string; next comes the legs of the bird hanging out, and as it groweth greater it openeth the shell by degrees, till at length it is all come forth, and hangeth onely by the bill, in short time after it cometh to full maturities, and falleth into the sea, where it gathereth feathers, and groweth to a fowle bigger than a Mallard, and lesser than a goose; which place aforesaid, and all those parts adjoining do so much abound therewith, that one of the best is bought for threepence."

Gerarde then goes on to say that spawning takes place in March and April, the geese are formed in May and June, "and come to fulness of feathers in the month after". It is worthy of note that he prefaces his strange description with the oath: "What our eyes have scene, and hands have touched, we shall declare!"

Winter brings other bird visitors to the bay, including great congregations of waders that turn and twist, rise and fall, as they perform their wonderful aerial evolutions along the edge of the tide, or scurry about like thousands of clockwork mice with busy twinkling feet across the wet mud and sand.

But perhaps the most interesting of the birds regularly seen about Morecambe Bay is the lesser black-backed gull. This gull is, of course, still regarded as being migratory in its habits, but the last two decades have seen an increasing tendency for many of them to remain with us throughout the whole of the year, and Morecambe Bay has been listed as the largest wintering ground in the country. Indeed, each winter the number of "stay at homes" seems to increase.

The bird life of the bay, then, changes; the old road across the sands is no longer in regular use. But the shellfish gatherers still pursue their calling as before. And, of course, the superb mountain setting is a permanent asset.

CHAPTER VII

MORECAMBE AND MORECAMBE BAY— CONTINUED

I

By now it should be quite obvious that the modern seaside resort of Morecambe took its name from the bay, and not the other way round. Indeed, Morecambe itself is of as late a vintage as Blackpool, although its foundations seem more deeply rooted.

In Domesday times there was the manor of Poulton, just one of those many manors about the Lancashire coast. Near by were the manors of Torrisholme and Bare, and a little farther away those of Heysham, Overton, and Heaton, the two last-mentioned on the north side of the Lune estuary. All had belonged to Tostig in pre-Conquest days, and were later incorporated in the possessions of the all-powerful Roger de Poitou.

Morecambe came little more than a century ago, when some enterprising railway officials constructed a harbour near Poulton, and its early story was one connected with seafaring. The silting of the approaches made it no longer possible to compete with the ports at Fleetwood and Barrow-in-Furness. Morecambe then turned to attracting the holiday crowds with a certain amount of success. Indeed, progress was sufficiently rapid for growth to proceed without due regard to careful planning—an omission which later generations are finding very difficult to rectify—and in that expansion the old townships of Bare and Torrisholme lost an individuality which Poulton had already sacrificed, and became part of the new town.

Heysham succeeded in remaining aloof until so lately as 1928, and when it did join it managed to retain its name, and the amalgamated borough became that of "Morecambe and Heysham". Officially it is still that, but, name or no name, Heysham has no more succeeded in retaining its individuality than Bare and Torrisholme, or even Poulton. Like them it is an old core—a beautiful one, too—surrounded by the later erections of a less dignified but perhaps more utilitarian age.

Much more recently, in post-war years in fact, Morecambe has extended in another direction. For long it shared a Parliamentary seat with Lancaster. Then came a redistribution. The two were separated, and along with Morecambe came a good slice of the coast and much of Lancashire north of the sands, extending in fact to the Dudden, which is the boundary between the County Palatine and Cumberland. At first the new name seemed likely to be that of Morecambe, but the folk of the rural areas, justly proud of their association with the ancient Hundred of Lonsdale, rightly opposed it. Parliament was compelled to listen to a discussion on the topic. Justice was done. The division is that of "Morecambe and Lonsdale"—and, knowing the staunchness of the folk of Lonsdale as I do, I can say with conviction that they are not likely to lose their identity in any way.

No wars, no disturbances, seemed to disturb the serenity of the old manor of Poulton. For centuries its folk were connected with the land and with the sea. They tilled their fields, they gathered their harvests of the bay. The manor, as did all manors, changed hands from time to time, but life around continued virtually unchanged until towards the middle of the fifteenth century, when ownership seems to have been somewhat dubious and the lands were divided among three families. One of the three was a branch of the famous Washingtons, ancestors of the first President of the United States of America, and who held many lands about North Lancashire and neighbouring Westmorland.

Then, indeed, did minor disturbances break out. Cattle were driven from one section of the manor to another. We learn of imprisonments at Lancaster for breaking the peace; even of the wife of Sir Robert Bellingham being "so cruelly pulled and 'lugged' by the fingers of her hands that the blood burst out of her finger ends". For some two hundred and fifty years there seem to have been constant disputes and bickerings and cases brought before the courts, but I cannot imagine that either farmfolk or fishermen were greatly disturbed.

The matter eventually sorted itself out, and when Gray came along in the early years of the last century he found Poulton a village of some 1,500 folk, now mainly occupied with inshore fishing and, as I have already mentioned, lamenting the latest tragedy of the sands. The Manor House was occupied by the Eidsforth family, one of whom had come into possession by direct

purchase. Later this same house was used as a rectory, and then in 1932 it was demolished. The old doorway is preserved near the Town Hall—and Morecambe points still to a link with the Washingtons.

Greater changes came in the 1840s, changes which were linked with the decay of Lancaster as a port of consequence. In 1845 a scheme was put forward to make a ship canal between the Lune and Poulton Deep, off the centre of the existing Morecambe promenade, and so give ships direct access to open water without having to make the passage of the shallow and tortuous Lune estuary. It was a final, somewhat desperate, fling to save the fortunes of a shrinking port. The formation of a company to be known as the Morecambe Bay Harbour Company, with a capital of £300,000, was announced. In this the North Western Railway Company appears to have had the controlling interest.

Any idea of salvaging the fortunes of the port of Lancaster by the construction of a ship canal were soon forgotten, and the idea of making a complete harbour at Poulton took its place. In 1846 the Morecambe Harbour and Railway Act received the sanction of Parliament. By then interest seems solely vested in the North Western Railway, who thus acquired what almost amounted to a proprietary concern in the development of Morecambe. Already a hotel had been built not far away from the present Midland Hotel.

Soon work on the new harbour was well in hand. A wooden jetty was built out towards the deeps, and the railway line continued from Lancaster to the shores of Morecambe Bay. Four years after the passing of the Act the new harbour was receiving its imports of iron and iron ore from the Furness and Cumberland coasts and the Clyde. Steamers began to ply regularly between the new port and Piel, the forerunner of Barrow on the opposite side of the bay, Glasgow, and even Northern Ireland. In another two years Morecambe was handling nearly double the tonnage of Lancaster and Glasson combined.

Meanwhile, Lancaster, with its time-honoured links with shipping, was envious of the newly found prosperity of its developing neighbour. There was a feeling that the ancient city had received scanty treatment at the hands of the new company. One of its newspapers, commenting on the arrival of the first ships, went to great pains to stress the more elaborate quays by the Lune and to emphasise the open situation of the jetty at Morecambe. It is

impossible not to be somewhat sympathetic with the feelings of the Lancaster quay authorities, but, at the same time, one cannot escape the fact that Lancaster's time as a port of consequence had departed, and it is doubtful whether even the construction of the canal could have done anything to revive it.

Morecambe's "golden age", however, was to be of comparatively short duration. Within fifteen years the Midland Railway had leased this section of the North Western lines. The Midland had been mainly behind the development of Barrow-in-Furness as a port. Before another decade had passed, Morecambe's traffic had been transferred to the north of the bay.

It was then that Morecambe turned elsewhere for its subsequent prosperity. Its future lay in its development as a holiday resort. And it has not fared badly either.

My hill-farming friends are fond of reminding me that a sheep's worst enemy is its neighbour, and that too many sheep on a grazing will soon cause its ruin. I am not at all sure that one seaside resort is not the enemy of the next. Blackpool had got a fair start when Morecambe turned from shipping to holiday traffic. Something of its pattern was already clearly defined. And that influence would still seem apparent.

Had Morecambe been able to make a complete break with its links with shipping, its development must surely have been on different lines. But that was not to be. If ships could no longer come to the stone pier which superseded the original wooden jetty with their cargoes, they could still come at the end of their career. The harbour was transferred into a ship-breaking yard, and many a good old vessel made her last journey up Poulton Deep. That trade has now gone—and Morecambe shed no tears at its passing. I have one of its last relics—a coloured sun-parlour roof made from glass salvaged from one of the old ships.

Half a century after the trade had crossed north of the bay, Morecambe had indeed altered completely and perpetually, so much so that Mr Dias Cromerty, in his *Picturesque Lancashire*, was able to describe it as "one of the great seaside resorts of Lancashire", and goes on to say:

"A severe taste finds Morecambe to be a combination of narrow streets, very dull or very shoppy, and a staring promenade with 'Amusements' written loud and large all over it.

There is a tiresome multitude of 'souvenirs' for sale, and the whole place speaks of crowd. But a severe taste thinks too much of itself. South Lancashire can't help being a crowd, and Morecambe has 'met a felt want'. Excellent and cheap provisions—fish, meat, fruit, and vegetables, good Lancashire bread and cakes—are to be had at every turn by the incomer; there is lots of boating, lots of 'hiring', good enough bathing. Finally, the most exacting of critics has to own that Morecambe has Sunsets [and Mr Cromerty was careful to use a capital 'S']: 'the orb of day' goes down splendidly to his rest beyond the Irish Sea, and all Lakeland, to the north, catches the glow . . ."

What changes has Morecambe made since then? It has, of course, developed, and by that I mean that today it is a residential as well as a watering place. Mr Cromerty speaks of "good Lancashire bread and cakes", but I have a feeling that the county west of the Pennine makes more than an equal contribution today. Morecambe seems possessed with an irresistible attraction for folk from the West Riding in general, and Bradford in particular. Many come to retire here; many travel to the West Riding each day, and the railway authority puts on a "residential" which whisks them through the Pennine passes to business at a morning hour when their colleagues of office and wool warehouse are still shaving, and then brings them back again at speed so that they reach home for the evening meal. In fact, two hours after stepping off Morecambe promenade one is in Foster Square at Bradford; two hours after leaving Bradford behind one is back again in the cleaner air of Morecambe Bay. Few who make the journey daily regard it as anything but worth-while.

Many of the private hotels and boarding houses, too, are in the hands of Yorkshire folk. I stress that as counterblast to Mr Cromerty's claim. But I very much doubt whether it really matters to the "incomer" who makes the bread and cakes so long as they are good. And both Lancashire and Yorkshire folk can be relied upon to see to that.

I certainly approve of his assertion that in catering for the crowds Morecambe has "met a felt want". Here, as in Blackpool, one sees the same happy, bustling masses in the centre, and then follows the promenade east or west to find plenty of room. The psychological aspect of this herding is an interesting study. Take a

detached view of it and it seems uncomfortable, unbecoming, and unbelievably hot. Yet no one looks really uncomfortable, many look hot, all look happy. And that's really what counts.

To see a Lancashire and Yorkshire crowd enjoying itself is to see something apart. I refrain from commenting further on the matter. It rather reminds me of the cricket spectator from the South who was tempted to "butt into an argument" at one of the "Roses" battles at Old Trafford and was immediately greeted with a chorus from all sides: "What's it t'doo wi' thee, anyway? Thee shut tha' clap!"

Go, then, into the fairground off the promenade—I know it does not compare with that at Blackpool for size—or to one of the concerts on the piers, and you will see what Morecambe has set out to do, and has achieved remarkably well. Then, if you be of the right turn of mind, stroll along the shore at the sunset hour and see something that is indelibly Morecambe's own, something that the crowds in the dance halls, the theatres, and the fun fair, miss.

To me, it is the sunset hour that gives Morecambe an individuality of its own. I often find myself wishing that that individuality had been developed in other ways.

2

Morecambe, like Blackpool, has its carnival of light. During the summer months, at the peak of the holiday season, workmen are busy erecting long streamers of coloured bulbs about the promenade. In recent years they have had the idea of placing the coat-of-arms of various towns and cities there, too. Whether it is a good plan to remind people of the existence of such spots as Bacup and Huddersfield and Morley when they are on holiday seems to me a debatable point.

In the park at the Bare, or east, end of the promenade various tableaux and scenes, futuristic and legendary, are erected, and thousands of lights will glow among the trees and shrubs.

As August comes to a close the lights are switched on, and the "illuminations season" commences. We met the same idea at Blackpool, of course, but there is a distinct difference between the two. Morecambe's sea front makes a wide arc and lends itself to a culminative effect which is totally absent at Blackpool. This,

rather than striking set pieces, is the key-note of the Morecambe scheme. Humpty Dumpty, Snow White, space ships and the like are confined rigidly to the park, where a charge is made for seeing them.

I am very doubtful, however, as to whether the folk who travel miles to see these autumn illuminations are out to see beauty. Rather do they seek an excuse for visiting the seaside when most of the official holidays are over. The railway assists them by running cheap excursions. But even so there seems little doubt that interest is on the wane. Morecambe's autumn crowds have been shrinking steadily in the past few years. I have walked along the promenade in mid-week with the twinkling lights all around me and no one very interested at all. I have not been able to do that at Blackpool.

Again one recalls the parable of the sheep. I have a notion that many of the coach companies advertise tours of the two sets of illuminations. They come first to Morecambe and then go on to Blackpool, where they visit the restaurants and dance halls until a late—or early morning—hour.

The illuminations end as autumn advances. The crowds, theoretically at any rate, vanish. The shopkeepers prepare for their "Tradesman's Holiday". And Morecambe gets ready for winter.

Getting ready for winter is, of course, a much more domestic affair than preparing for the summer visitors. There are no urgent calls on painters and outward transformations of the scene. What it really means is that various local societies that have been dormant during the summer months spring to life. A glance through a local directory shows their scope. There is a musical committee which runs one of the oldest festivals in the land. There is a multitude of operatic societies and even more dramatic organisations. Morecambe does, I am told, claim to be the most drama-minded town in the North. Yet when its dramatic festivals take place the chief prizes invariably go far afield. Perhaps Morecambe is too drama-minded and distributes its talents among too many organisations.

The local directory also reveals that Morecambe is quite cosmopolitan in its population. There are societies of Nelsonians, Blackburnites, Rochdaliens, Halifaxites, Oldhamers, and so forth. Personally I find it difficult to see what function they serve. Were I so fond of my Rochdale or Halifax or Oldham I would have stayed

there among the Pennine hills. Then I note the ubiquitous Caledonian and Yorkshire Societies. Some folk manage to be in both these. They trace back pedigrees to find sufficient qualification as both Scot and Yorkshireman. Perhaps, as one doubtless jealous critic remarked, the real qualification for dual membership is that both Scot and Yorkshireman share a common dislike of the English!

I notice an omission. There is no Society of Morecambrians! Have the descendants of those old families of Poulton, of the 1,500 folk who were there before there was even a Morecambe, been swallowed piecemeal in this later invasion from the east? If not, where do we look for them?

We are most likely to find them on the promenade near the Central Pier. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say just off the promenade, for their usual place is one or other of the jetties. They are, as were their ancestors, still concerned with the sea, still fishermen, although one must admit that many of them derive at least a part of their income from taking pleasure parties about the bay during the summer months.

I have already mentioned the shellfish gatherers of the sands, but Morecambe Bay also abounds in such species as codling, dabs, flounders, plaice, conger, tope, mackerel, and bass, and these, of course, are caught in legitimate fashion from boats.

Time was when the Morecambe fisherfolk used a special craft of their own known as the *nobby*, a specially designed "smack" with mainsail, topsail, foresail, and jib, and carrying bow nets. Not only did they operate in a bay notorious for its swift tides and river currents but also in a place where the prevailing south-west winds, blowing unchecked across the widest expanse of Irish Sea between the coasts of Eire and Lancashire, can whip the waves into a frenzy hardly realised by those holiday making along the shores.

Nevertheless, the boats were often enough worked by one man, who undertook the duties of seamanship and hauling in the nets. Today there are few of the old time *nobbies* left, and the motor-driven craft have reduced many of the hazards, but, even so, a knowledge of the tides and currents is as essential as ever.

There are mussel skeers, too, off the coast between Morecambe and Heysham, and during the winter months these shellfish are taken with a special "craam" some twenty feet in length having a rake-like attachment at the end which can, of course, be worked

from a boat. Time was when these were regarded as the finest mussel skeers between the Solway and the Welsh coast, but catches have fallen off a deal in the last two or three decades. Time was, too, when the mussels were washed on the promenade, but now this very necessary operation has been confined to the slipways.

So long as the fisherfolk remain, there will be no need for a Society of Morecambrians. These stout-hearted folk maintain a continuity that is founded on practice and inheritance. And when last I walked through Poulton itself, on a sunny summer's eve with the sun glinting on the whitened walls, and saw the cottages walled of rough pebbles and read the sixteenth-century dates on some of the lintels, I felt that the place still lived on; and that even the later erections had come so far and stopped as if to pay some respect to the Poulton which forms the very ancestral root of all that is Morecambe.

3

Go from Morecambe to Heysham. Every visitor does that, despite the fact that today the two are joined together as one municipality. By going to Heysham one really means continuing past a succession of modern houses, shops, and hotels to a little square, lined by numerous antique shops and with gypsy fortune-tellers in attendance, and then walking down the short "Main Street" to the rocky shore.

Described thus, to go to Heysham seems a very unexciting sort of business. Yet that main street has a character of its very own. It is unlike anything else I know along the Lancashire coast. The Cornish St Ives, Yorkshire's Whitby, the same county's Flamborough, Devon's Clovelly—yes, somehow Heysham reminds one of all four, and remains quite distinct.

Its whiteness is delightful. I'm not going to spoil things by mentioning how often that whiteness is renewed, nor have I attempted to ascertain whether it forms part of any pre-holiday season cleaning ritual. I am quite content to know that here is a rapidly dropping street, lined with picturesque houses, coming to an abrupt end in a somewhat rocky cove. And there, at Greece Cottage, Turner, perhaps the most famous of all sunset painters, once stayed—and, dare we claim, the whole world has been better for it.

Heysham—the “ham” or home of “Hesse”, an Anglian chieftain—has its links with the sea. Tradition claims that John o’ Gaunt regarded it as the little port for his town of Lancaster. Its main link, however, was with fishing. Mussels and the fish of the bay were brought into the sheltered cove, unloaded, and carried by pony-drawn carts up that steep main street. Special rough sandstone blocks were placed down to afford a better grip. Some of the fish, however, was carried farther inland by means of pack pony, and the memory of that is still kept extant in the ancient borough of Clitheroe where a cockle and mussel feast is maintained by the local town council as part of its mayor-making celebrations.

Clitheroe is in the limestone area of Lancashire, and some of the produce of the local quarries was taken to the port at Heysham. Rather than come back with empty panniers, supplies of shellfish were carried on the return journey.

That same rocky shore is also connected with the story of St Patrick, who, something rather stronger than legend tells us, was shipwrecked off Heysham after his escape from Ireland. Dr Fred Hogarth, an indefatigable local historian, has been at pains to unravel the true story and tells us that before his elevation to a bishopric St Patrick was Succat, son of one of the Roman garrison at the fort where Dumbarton now stands on the north side of the Clyde. As a youth of fifteen years he was captured and taken as a slave to Ireland, where he herded swine on the slope of Slemish, above the Braid valley. That was in A.D. 388.

Six years later the slave lad escaped. He travelled westward to the coast and there joined a ship sailing for the Clyde. The ship was forced away from its real destination, came down the Cumberland coast, and finally ran aground at Heysham, at the place now called St Patrick’s Skeer. Henceforward his return to Scotland was by way of North Lancashire, Westmorland, and Cumberland.

There is, however, a stronger and much more vivid link with St Patrick than either story or the skeer. On the top of Heysham Head, and approached by the churchyard path past the lovely St Peter’s Church, are the ruins of an ancient cell which bears the name St Patrick’s Chapel. Some authorities have it that it was actually built by the man who later became Bishop Patricius and undertook several preaching tours of the West of England, to

commemorate the scene of his shipwreck; others say that it was founded by a band of Irish missionaries and given the name of their patron saint. But whichever is correct, a study of those still solid walls, "welded together", as one authority puts it, "in a mass of almost impenetrable mortar, made in Roman fashion with burnt shells for lime, poured in hot between the irregular stones", reveals a very definite Roman influence. And Succat, remember, was brought up as a youth in a Roman camp.

Not every historian accepts the version I have given. That would be too much to expect. Some are willing to make a compromise and say that Patrick was already Archbishop of Armagh and was on his way to Britain when the wreck took place at Heysham. But whatever the real reason, St Patrick's Day seems to have been observed quite regularly in Heysham for many centuries afterwards, and in a record of a conveyance of land in 1272 we find mention of a yearly tribute of an arrow to be made on this day.

Just when the old chapel on the hill fell into disuse does not seem to be known, but pagan raiders—either Angles or Danes—are generally regarded as the culprits. The strong sea winds added to the work of destruction. But St Patrick's Chapel was, as we have seen, strongly built. In 1903 protective measures were introduced to prevent further decay. That so much had stood for upwards of a thousand years is the finest testimony I know to the work of its original builders.

Close beside the roofless cell are some interesting graves hewn out of the solid rock. The only other place, I am told, where similar relics may be seen is near Saffron Waldron, in Essex.

Come down from the hill top and inspect the much more sheltered parish church of St Peter. Perhaps we are satiated with things of antiquity, but this church, too, demands our attention. Part of it is tenth-century work, and we can see how closely the later builders followed the pattern of the, even then, ruined chapel on the hill. The arched stone-work is almost a slavish imitation.

But the new church was soon to outstrip the one on the hill. A chancel was added in the Norman period of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, when Heysham Church, like the Priory of St Mary at Lancaster, formed part of the possessions of the Norman Abbey of Seez. A south aisle was added in the fifteenth century,

and this was lengthened two hundred years later, and, in 1864, a north aisle was added. Yet in spite of all the differing periods of architecture there is nothing in Heysham Church to jar on the eye. What is more important is that it is a church that is used. Try and get a seat there on a Sunday morning in the summer months, unless you are there in good time you will have to be content with a stroll round the outside.

Even a stroll round the outside is not an uninteresting business. In the churchyard is a hog-backed stone which antiquaries agree is one of the best preserved in the land. It was buried for many centuries and only discovered by accident in 1800, which doubtless accounts for the fine condition of the carvings. The scenes depicted are illustrative of some Scandinavian saga, and have been interpreted in diverse ways. There is a wonderful array of both men and beasts which some authorities have identified with a hunting scene and others with St Patrick's own poem, *Faid Faida*, the Deer's Cry. I will not attempt to add to the interpretations. Nor will I say otherwise than that it is without doubt an old grave cover, although again there is controversy concerning whether the interred was some invader or a Scandinavian chieftain of local fame.

Not far away is the shaft of an old cross which is most probably tenth-century work and, again, ornamented with a succession of designs which have caused a deal of argument among the experts. In this same graveyard, too, is a stone coffin, very similar to those found at so many abbeys and priories, and generally ascribed to the twelfth or thirteenth century. Truly Heysham, with its ruined chapel on the hill, its parish church of St Peter, and its various monuments in the churchyard, is representative of a plethora of periods.

One may be pardoned for asking why, in a place so intimately associated with St Patrick, the parish church should be dedicated to St Peter. Mr Pape, however, has explained that in many Welsh Bibles Peter is rendered Pedr and a Peterite is Pedrawg and Pedrog and finally Patric. Remembering this, there is quite a close affinity between the two.

Back again to the village. One may not relish the sight of so many penny-in-the-slot machines or feel inclined to patronise the rival fortune-tellers claiming a kinship with the famous Morgiäna Lee. Much more interesting, and certainly more original, are the

notices indicating that "Nettle Beer" can be bought at many of the houses.

For more than fifty years this drink has been associated with the Lancashire coastal village. Indeed, no one seems quite certain just when it was first brewed, but the fact remains that thousands of gallons are being made and sold each year by such families as the Hutchinsons, Winders, Unsworths, and others. Naturally, the actual recipes are kept secret, and may vary from one maker to another, but such things as nettles, sugar, yeast, ginger, and liquorice are all used. It seems to be quite impotent, yet there is a sharp tang about it that has an appeal of its own. And it is not surprising to learn that unless it is stored in a cool place it can quite easily blow the cork out or even burst the bottle itself.

4

Thousands of folk who have never set eyes on the village or heard of its links with St Patrick or even with nettle beer know Heysham by name. Every afternoon during the week the Belfast boat train leaves Euston station destined for Heysham Harbour. There are similar "boat trains" from Manchester and Leeds. Heysham Harbour is one of the chief ports for the crossing to Northern Ireland.

The harbour itself is some distance away from the village, as many an Irish-bound traveller who has decided to while away the time for the boat in Morecambe knows. It was built by the old Midland railway early in the century, after Morecambe had long since been abandoned as a port and Barrow-in-Furness had proved to be somewhat inaccessible. For a time it competed successfully against the older harbour of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway at Fleetwood. When the two railways amalgamated it supplanted its rival, and Fleetwood turned mainly to fishing, although it has still retained the principal Isle of Man crossing.

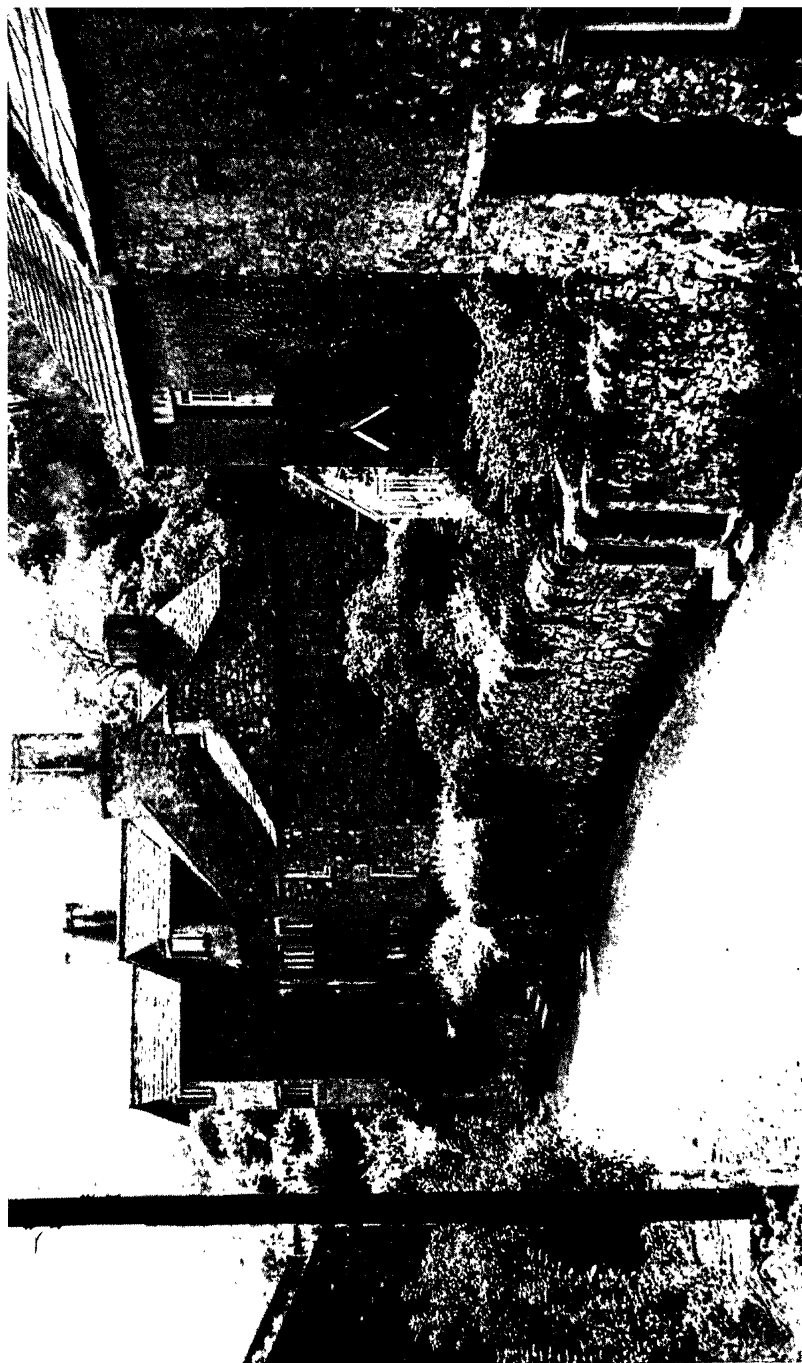
Heysham owed much of its success to the nearby Heysham Lake, which is really a deep channel through the sands of Morecambe Bay scoured by the passage of the River Lune. Three-quarters of a mile in width, and with a depth of sixty feet in places, it extends from off the shore to some four miles into the mouth of the bay. In the days of sail its calmness made it a safe refuge in time of storm; in the later days of steam it afforded a good passage to

the harbour and did away with some of the more tortuous means of entering other ports of the nearby coast.

There were golden hopes of prosperity in the days when Heysham Harbour was opened. Indeed, our old friend Deas Cromarty waxed enthusiastic about its future. Writing of Heysham in his *Picturesque Lancashire* he told us:

“The name is going to be of importance to the modern world. Somebody, prospecting with a keen eye and a practical genius, observed that between the Mersey and the Clyde there was no harbour which could be entered by large vessels without reference to the state of the tide. Barrow has unfortunately no deep current, and the Lune creeps out among sands; but Heysham Lake, as it is called, a channel five fathoms deep, running out of Morecambe Bay from the Near Naze right into Lancaster Sound, offered a waterway that would serve for any traffic. The Midland Railway Company possessed themselves of this opportunity, and Heysham Harbour is now equipped. Breakwaters, quays, landing-stages, electric lighting, accommodation of every kind for passengers, and for cattle and fish carriage, show that a great future is contemplated. There will be direct communication some day, *via* Heysham, between the central district of England and the cities of America.”

Alas, such exaggerated hopes never even approached maturity. True, ships from many European ports come along, and their number has increased with the building of large chemical works and oil refineries a little lower down the coast. But Belfast is the chief port served by a regular service. Each night the ships go down Heysham Lake; each morning one comes in from the Irish Sea to unload its passengers. Sometimes, too, there is the more macabre and, to me, distinctly disturbing sight of horses coming ashore, many, alas, destined for the slaughter-house. Occasionally comes a more cheering sight—a good hunter bred in the Irish bog, or a stalwart riding pony, each destined for a much more pleasant career. Here, too, come those solidly built Irish horses of bone and substance which can be seen pulling the landaus which are still a feature of Morecambe’s summer season. Time was when they pulled trams along the promenade, but Morecambe, unlike Douglas, Isle of Man, has dispensed with its horse-drawn trams, possibly the last English resort to do so.





In the summer months, too, there is a weekly service to the Isle of Man. But Mr Cromarty's dreams of crossing the Atlantic from Heysham have remained but dreams.

There is a canopy of smoke and the spectacle of belching chimneys at Middleton, just down the coast, where great works have been established in these post-war years. Near at hand are Middleton Sands, the biggest expanse within easy reach of Morecambe. Here some local historians have sited the almost legendary Battle of Brunanburgh. There are many places in different parts of the country putting forward a similar claim. On the edge of the sand, and beyond the chimneys, is a large holiday camp.

Not so long ago this peninsula between Heysham and the Lune estuary was a lonely spot of quiet villages, and dotted with farms. Inland was Heysham Moss, a haunt of wild birds and with vast peat hags. We get an idea of the quaintness of the old villages at Overton, where the Woodhouse family built many of the *nobbies*; and here salmon fishing was the chief occupation of those inhabitants not engaged in boat-building or agriculture. To remind one of these old links with the sea there is the sign of a sailing ship above the door of one of its inns.

Overton village is a happy mixture of the seventeenth century and the Georgian era. Some of the masonry was undoubtedly brought across the Lune mouth from Cockersand Abbey. Its church is older still. Parts date back to pre-Norman times and its foundation is contemporaneous with that at Heysham. Here, too, there seems no doubt that the old chapel of St Patrick served as a model in the original construction. And like St Peter's there is the mark of later centuries about its fabric.

For a time Overton was attached to the Priory Church of St Mary at Lancaster, and when, in 1650, Oliver Cromwell ordered an inquiry into the value and state of all ecclesiastical benefices and livings throughout the country it was stated:

"That Overton had anciently but not of late £4 per annum paid by the Vicar of Lancaster, and about three years since £40 per annum granted by the committee of plundered ministers, now reduced to about £16, on account of which reduction their minister, an honest, godly, painful man, had lately gone from them for want of maintenance.

"That being six miles distant from Lancaster, their parish

church, and so surrounded by the flowing sea twice in twenty-four hours that they could not pass to their church, the inhabitants of the Overton chapelry, being about 80 families, prayed for a settled maintenance and ministry, and to be made a parish of themselves."

Overton's ecclesiastical difficulties have long since been overcome, but the problem of the flowing sea still remains. Go beyond the Globe Inn to the edge of the marsh and, at low tide, there will be found a good solid road leading through a stretch of shining, wet ooze towards the little hamlet of Sunderland Point. A notice at the entrance to the road warns that it is impassable at high tide.

The villagers of Sunderland, indeed, plan their activities with an eye on the tide table. In winter they hold regular lectures in the little village institute, and the times of starting are dictated by the moon and state of the tide. I have spoken to an audience of fisherfolk and retired business men and their wives, with a car halted on the shingle shore some distance away and the knowledge that the road must be crossed back to Overton before the tide came in. I understand that one soon gets used to having one's activities dictated in this fashion, and that life at Sunderland Point is a completely happy existence.

The village itself is impressive. The one line of houses and buildings facing the entrance to the Lune is pretty much the same as it was when Robert Lawson, the Lancaster Quaker merchant, lived there in those early seventeenth-century years when the Lune looked to the West Indies for prosperity. Lawson's reign here was brief but its impression has been lasting. Perhaps he lived too well. Certainly his contemporary and fellow Quaker, William Stout, had no illusions about his ultimate downfall, commenting in his *Autobiography* that

"he [Lawson] had done as much in merchandise here as all the rest, and had good success in trade, but employed the profit in superfluity of buying land at great prices, and building chargeable and unnecessary houses, barns, gardens, and other fancies, and costly furniture, so that he overshot himself."

I like the final phrase—"overshot himself". It crystallises a whole host of homilies. And it accounts for the present outline of Sunderland Point.

Lawson did not see the building of Glasson Dock. When that

came into operation as a port, Sunderland, with no security of anchorage, slipped away into its present state. Yet it has one claim to fame. According to Edward Baines's *History of Lancashire*, "the early importation of cotton wool by Mr Robert Lawson at this point took place about the early part of the last [the eighteenth] century".

I would emphasise the fact that it was cotton wool and not the cotton of Lancashire's staple industry that was landed here. For a year, we are told, the initial cargo remained in Lawson's warehouse until someone decided what should be done with it. Today, the local folk point to a large kapok, or cotton, tree in front of Sunderland's row of houses. In early summer it bears long tassels of silky fibre. It is, of course, a cotton *tree* and not the ordinary cotton *shrub*. Not far away, too, is the grave of a negro slave—Black Sambo's Grave the guide books call it—yet another reminder of the old days of sail and cross-Atlantic trading.

It was, however, the "flowing sea" separating Overton from Lancaster that was referred to by Cromwell's commissioners. Along the north shore of the Lune estuary are similar roads to that between Overton and Sunderland Point. They lead along the lonely marshes in the direction of the county city. They go by way of Heaton-with-Oxcliffe and Ovangle Salt Ayre—names that somehow conjure up the salt tang of the tide-washed flats, with their calling seabirds and waders, and the mists that come stealing up the river, bringing an atmosphere of eeriness to the scene. And within a few miles we are back again in Morecambe, the holiday metropolis of the bay.

5

We leave Morecambe again, this time by the eastward promenade. And having passed the last of the boarding houses, the green golf course and over a little mound we come to the first of the villages of the bay itself, Hest Bank.

I say the first of the villages of the bay, but, truth to tell, Hest Bank is hardly typical of these coastal places. The influence of Morecambe itself, and Lancaster, and even Manchester, is quite obvious. Those neat houses lining either side of the road, with their well-kept gardens complete with spacious lawns and orderly flower-beds, indicate the changed character of what was once a fishing hamlet. Many of their occupants have but recently cast off

the chains of industry and commerce; some have not even rid themselves of the shackles. Indeed, they catch the 7.42 morning train to Manchester with just the same unfailing regularity as their brethren of Surrey and Sussex catch the early trains to the city. And in the evening they watch the sun set across the wide bay—and leave cotton and commerce to look after themselves until next day.

One hears and reads much of the spreading influence of "The Great Wen". Manchester's suburbs stretch just as far, even to the edge of Morecambe Bay.

Do not misunderstand me. Manchester's influence on Hest Bank has been restricted to sending out some of its workers, mainly those of the professional and business executive type, and these, wisely, have not brought the city with them. At weekends and during holiday times these men work in their gardens or even fish in the local canal, cotton completely forgotten in the return to the very elements from which their families were hewn and which will, after commerce has claimed their better years, recall them. And their womenfolk, for whom the break has been more complete, have their Women's Institute. And the Women's Institute is rural enough for all conscience.

Time has brought changes but left the core intact. I have said that before. I repeat it of Hest Bank. The core is still there. To find it, turn off the main road opposite the railway station (with its reminders of the 7.42 train to Manchester), cross the bridge over the canal, and the change is sudden and complete. We have reached that core. The houses look old, grey, and soft, and close at hand is the Hest Bank Hotel, still retaining the old lantern room in which shone the light that guided the wanderers across the sands in that stirring period I wrote of in the last chapter. We have shed a century since we crossed that bridge over the canal; a waterway that, for the completeness of the transformation, might almost have been the Styx.

That canal was important in forging another of Hest Bank's old links with the sea. Indeed, it was the opening of the Lancaster to Kendal canal that brought Hest Bank into prominence as a coastal port for a brief but somewhat ambitious spell. In 1820 plans were made for the construction of a pier or breakwater to enable small coasting vessels to discharge their cargoes and passengers. Eighteen months later, in March, 1822, came the first of these, the *Duke of Lancaster*. She sailed from Liverpool, went first to Piel, on the

north side of the bay, where she landed some passengers. She then crossed the bay and made for Hest Bank, only to run aground at Bare owing to the low state of the water. There she disembarked some one hundred and twenty passengers, went to her destination by the next tide, and then back to Liverpool the next day. In reporting this incident the *Lancaster Gazette* for 21st March, 1822, added: "Being the first steamer that had appeared on this part of the coast, a large number of passengers assembled to see her."

Such sights, however, were apparently not repeated. Within a month the *Duke of Lancaster* was advertised as being on a new run between Liverpool and Dumfries.

The withdrawal of the passenger service from Liverpool was not, however, the end of the matter. A concern known as the Kendal and Hest Bank Shipping Company set up business, and a writer of 1831, referring to the pier, said that "vessels from Liverpool and Glasgow load and unload their cargoes, and, by means of a canal extending to within a short distance of the shore, a considerable trade is carried on with Kendal and other inland places."

Always, however, was there the difficulty of an approach at low tide. When Glasson Dock, on the south side of the Lune estuary, was connected by canal with the Preston to Kendal waterway in 1826, trade at Hest Bank declined considerably. Within eight years the Kendal and Hest Bank Shipping Company had virtually ceased to exist as such. Another two years and Hest Bank's career as a port was already a thing of the past. Today only a decaying stump or two in the sands off the present railway station remain as evidence of an almost forgotten incident in the story of Lancashire's coastal shipping trade.

The coast road continues east from Hest Bank, and still we see the modern houses lining its flanks. And almost without any break we are out of Hest Bank and entering Bolton-le-Sands.

Now Bolton-le-Sands, too, is spreading its radius. The main A.6 road to Glasgow comes in from Lancaster to by-pass the older part of the village and join the road from Morecambe to Carnforth. It is as well that the by-pass is there, for the growth of modernity has remained with the newer roads. The older builders of Bolton-le-Sands erected their homes around the compact grey church. The newcomers prefer main roads to the proximity of a church, and so once more we get the core of an ancient village

surrounded by the later erections of those drawn to rural areas by the provision of easier transport to the towns and cities.

For a time these developments—here and elsewhere about the Lancashire coast—produced little more than an outward change of appearance. Those who came to live in the new houses were drawn by the latent appeal of living in the country. There was no fixed line of demarcation between the families whose ancestral roots delved deep into village history and the new folk from the towns. Each contributed to the well-being of the community. Village life seemed the stronger and more steadfast, and made its impress upon the newer generations of village dwellers. The latter were indeed ready—and often anxious—to be absorbed, to be accepted as part and parcel of the village.

I write this with somewhat deep-rooted personal feelings. Anxious as we were to shake off the influence of the towns, we ourselves looked for a home in this very village. We found it—among a colony of new houses recently erected; houses that no one could possibly pretend fitted in, architecturally or otherwise, with the older place. But they had the advantage of being somewhat discreetly hidden from the main road.

Then came the war, with its subsequent upheavals and journeyings. Peace restored, our little colony began to expand. It lost whatever modesty it had on intruding into the older scene around. We moved elsewhere while the building spate was gathering momentum. Now when I go that way I find similar colonies spreading like a red rash about what was once a fair and green countryside. Perhaps, unwittingly, we took part in this “development” of an old village, but so long as the new buildings were limited there seemed little fear of any real disturbance of old-established ways.

I am not so sure about the more recent impact of the town upon the country. An encircling movement has left the older village an oasis of grey in the midst of brick and pebble-dash. Its influence has diminished, with the consequent upheaval of village life and tradition. I mention this while writing of Bolton-le-Sands, but I know that the same story is being repeated in dozens of villages near the Lancashire coast.

It is, withal, pleasant to be able to record that the heart of Bolton-le-Sands can still be seen. You will find it at some minor cross-roads, a quarter of a mile from where the A.6 commences its

by-pass. There, within a few yards of each other, are the older shops, the school, the three churches—Church of England, Roman Catholic, and Nonconformist—in short, all that is essential for the well-being of any village community. And away up a quiet lane, past some seventeenth-century cottages, a narrow high-hedge-bordered way goes through a shallow dale on its way towards Lancaster. That is the old road from Scotland—the way used by the Jacobites during the 1715 and 1745 rebellions—a reminder of the days when roads passed right through villages instead of by-passing them.

There was a church here at Bolton-le-Sands as long ago as in 1094, for a "Church of Boelton" is mentioned in the list of things granted to the Prior of Lancaster by Roger de Poitou in that year. It is, however, quite likely that a church existed on the present site before the Conquest, for evidence of tenth-century work has been found in the north wall of the tower. The bulk of that tower, however, dates from the thirteenth century; but the church was restored six hundred years later, and a great deal of the original masonry has been lost among later alterations. In the baptistry at the base of the tower are two interesting old stones, one being a piece of the old village cross and the other a fragment of a hog-back monument, similar to that already mentioned at Heysham.

The shore is a good half-mile from the village, and here a line of houses stands along a windswept lane overlooking a wide expanse of marsh, covered with sea pink, or thrift, at the appropriate time of the year. High tide brings the sea right across this marsh, and normally it is a long walk across the saltings—where the lapwing and curlew can be heard during the winter months, and the noisy redshank is an all-the-year-round resident—to reach the edge of the tide. This, of course, is the marsh crossed by the inshore fisher-folk on their way to the cockle beds and shrimping grounds of Morecambe Bay.

A mile along the main road from Bolton-le-Sands is Carnforth, and here there is a complete change of atmosphere. At both Hest Bank and Bolton-le-Sands we were able to find an inner core of antiquity. At Carnforth it is absent. Carnforth, as we see it, is of a period when industry had supplanted agriculture, and both hematite and iron and steel were being forged in the district. A century ago the six blast furnaces were turning out between 3,000 and 4,000 tons of pig iron a week, and 1,500 to 2,000 tons of

steel were being forged. Gradually trade diminished; in the years between the two wars the last of the works closed down. By then, trade had shrunk to a minimum.

It was impossible for any town to have endured such a change without its very soul being shaken. Fortunately the decline of the iron and steel workings coincided with the growth of the place as a railway centre, the junction of the Furness line with those between Glasgow and London and eastwards into Yorkshire. Many men found employment in the railway sheds. Many still do. One hears no one talking of iron in Carnforth today; at all times of the day and night one sees men making their way to the railway station as a new shift is about to start. Yet Carnforth somehow fails to fit into the fabric of the southern shore of Morecambe Bay. Devoid of any pretensions to beauty, architectural or otherwise, it might as well be placed among the industrial villages and towns of East Lancashire. And even they, in their long connexion with the growth of textiles, have perhaps more character. But one cannot blame Carnforth; there have been too many changes of fortune to allow it to develop a character of its own.

The name itself is old enough for all conscience. It means the ford of the Kerne, or Keer as it is today. That ford was important; it was on the main way north to Scotland. And when the ford was replaced by a bridge the town grew and prospered. Yet in the fields beside that river men still ploughed with teams of oxen.

Carnforth, like so many of the places of the Lancashire coast, was once a port of sorts, and ships were built here. John Lucas, the local historian of the early eighteenth century, said that in his time trading vessels from the ports of western England, the Isle of Man, Scotland, and Ireland frequently put in at the Keer estuary, but went on to point out that in those days trade was but a tithe of that in previous years, and referred to a sudden subsidence of the salt marsh on the south bank of the estuary exhibiting "a buried shipyard, in which were large quantities of timber, some unwrought and others partly formed into vessels". Today no ship can face the sand barriers that have filled in the course of the Keer.

From Carnforth there is a branch road indicating the way to Silverdale, and one of the loveliest of all pieces of sylvan Lancashire. Indeed, only proximity to the Lake Country can have been responsible for the neglect of this bonny bit of English scenery on the part of so many tourists. Place the villages of Silverdale and the

two Yealands, Conyers and Redmayne—names that are in themselves suggestive of beauty of setting—elsewhere in the land and their fame would have been widespread.

For a while the road runs through flat land and then a further branch way leads into Warton, a somewhat straggling village placed in the shadow of its outstanding limestone crag.

Warton should really vie with Sulgrave, in Northamptonshire, as the Mecca of the American visitor, for its connexions with the famous Washingtons go nearer the ancestral root of the family. The link is made realistic by a visit to the church, where on the outside of the western wall of the fifteenth-century tower is a shield, protected too late by a glass cover to save it from erosion, which can be discerned as displaying the armorial bearings of the Washingtons—"Arg. 2 bars, Gul, 3 mullions of the 2nd, with a crescent for difference"—which, according to Lucas, "is a plain indication that this family, ancient and yet credible in the town, where the Rev Laurence Washington has a good estate, have been large contributors towards the building of this fabric." It is generally believed that this coat of arms was the source of the Stars and Stripes emblem of the United States.

The Washingtons were really a Durham family, originating from a small village named Wessington, and even today there are Old Washington and Washington marked on the maps of that county. One branch of the family settled on the borders of Lancashire and Westmorland, and eventually came into the possession of lands around Kendal and in the vicinity of Warton, and it was from this branch that George Washington was descended.

It was one Robert Washington, who lived at Warton in the fifteenth century, who was probably responsible for the erection of the church tower and is commemorated by the shield. A grandson of this man married a member of the Kitson family, who had extensive estates in Northamptonshire, and his son settled at Sulgrave Manor. He was the ancestor of the first President of the United States.

Although the main branch of the family gravitated to Northamptonshire, there were Washingtons living at Warton until a century ago, and the headstones of their graves can be seen in the churchyard near the eastern wall of the church.

Above the church is Warton Crag, a limestone eminence which is one of the landmarks of Morecambe Bay. It is not high as north

country hills go, its summit being no more than 450 feet above sea-level, but as a viewpoint it is unsurpassed in the area. From the top the whole curve of Morecambe Bay is visible, with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Pennines and the long line of the Lakeland mountains adding to the extensive panorama. Its limestone flanks, too, have been worn into terraces and pinnacles of various fantastic shapes, and among them numerous varieties of sub-Alpine plants find sustenance and bring delight to those with botanical tastes. On the top, too, the old Britons had a camp of sorts. In high summer one can envy their choice of site; in winter, especially when the winds blow unchecked from the west, one is inclined to reverse such an opinion.

Forward from Warton village the road passes along what almost amounts to a tunnel through the woodlands. It is difficult to imagine that such sylvan scenery should form part of a county whose beauty has so often been overlooked through the greater publicity afforded to its textile and coal-mining areas; although in actuality Lancashire is at least two-thirds entirely rural and only a relatively small portion of its acres have been given over to manufacturing. Is it, therefore, to be wondered at that the villages of Morecambe Bay should call so many back to the rural life of their forebears? It is equally hard to realise why, with the main A.6 highway but a mile away, this road along the flanks of Warton Crag is so little known.

We emerge from the woods into light—the beautiful light of a colourful countryside. Away on the right are miles and miles of green field and grey crag, and on the eastern horizon the blue walls of the Pennine fells.

Almost immediately we enter the village of Yealand Conyers, the Jalant of Domesday Book, and before that another of Earl Tostig's possessions. Today it puts forward a fair claim to being the loveliest village of North Lancashire, and seen on the right sort of day, when the gardens are riotous in colour and the clean houses and cottages seem to catch up the rays of the sun, it would be hard to dispute such a claim.

Even this apparent backwater of life, where everything speaks of tranquillity and peace, has made its own contribution to history, especially in the story of the Quaker movement, which has always had one of its strongholds in this part of North Lancashire. There, after service with Cromwell's army, Captain Richard

Hubberthorne, son of a local farmer, came back to his own village and was among the early "converts". He was often in association with George Fox, who spent much time in these parts. Indeed describing a visit to Yealand in 1652, Fox tells us in his *Journal* :

"After, I went to Yealand, where there was a great meeting. In the evening there came a priest to the house, with a pistole in his hand, under pretence to light a pipe of tobacco. The maid of the house, seeing the pistole, told her master; who clapping his hands on the doorposts told him he should not come in there. While he stood there, keeping the doorway, he looked up, and spied over the wall a company of men coming, some armed with staves and one with a musket. But the Lord God prevented their bloody design; so that seeing themselves discovered they went their way and did no harm."

The early days of the Quaker movement, as we have already seen, were times of great tribulation throughout the country, and the little community of "Seekers" at Yealand fared no better than the rest. Two great landowning families, the Middletons of Leighton Hall and the Bindloss's of Borwick, near Carnforth, had both suffered through their Royalist sympathies, the former having to pay a fine of over £2,600 in order to retain their estate. They looked upon the Friends as Commonwealth supporters, and the latter had to meet not only abuse but violence. The tenantry, in spite of having had their rents raised beyond all reason in order that the landlords might meet their dues, were more concerned in avoiding further trouble with the big families than religious freedom. But the little band of Friends remained true to their faith.

The late Miss Elisabeth Brockback, a local artist-writer and a prominent member of the Society of Friends, has penned a monograph of Richard Hubberthorne in which she gives an insight into the Yealand of his time. On one occasion, she tells us :

"The servants of Sir Robert Bindloss of Borwick Hall and Sir George Middleton of Leighton, both ardent Royalists, set up and abused Friends going to and from their meetings. On one occasion they set upon three women Friends going to a meeting in Yealand and set upon them with impudent scoffs, and one of them carried himself very abusively and immodestly towards them. The same man abused other Friends also, would

have cut them with an axe, but was restrained by some of his fellows. Another time the same man set upon six Friends that were going to a meeting at Yealand and beat and abused them very much, so that he bruised their faces and shed much of their blood, wounding them very sore; yet they lifted not a hand against him."

It seems hard to associate such happenings with the Yealand we now see, yet there are many who attribute its quiet serenity with the steadfast way of life of those who withstood persecution, spells of imprisonment, and even confiscation of all their goods with a staunchness that only those whose abounding faith overshadows all else can really appreciate. The original Friends' Meeting House at Yealand Conyers, dated 1692, still stands, and adjoining it is the old Quaker school that has now become a community centre for the district, with lectures and classes held during the winter months. Here, then, is Lancashire rural life developed to a fine degree of culture. Yealand Conyers has no core surrounded by the houses of a later age. True, the buildings are of different periods, but the spirit of the place is in its people.

Over the ridge, which is a continuation of the limestone upland of Warton Crag and upon whose brink the men of Yealand formerly played cricket on a pitch surrounded by the stones of an ancient stone circle, paths drop down the woods to Leighton Park, with the lovely white façade of Leighton Hall retaining all the stateliness of a home still in private hands. Throughout its long history it has never passed out of Catholic possession. Its owners have felt the full weight of religious persecution, but have clung steadfastly to their abode. Sir George Middleton, as we have just seen, was heavily fined for his Royalist sympathies yet he succeeded in hanging on to his estate. After the 1715 rebellion, Albert Hodgson, the then owner, was imprisoned for having supported the Pretender, and the house was plundered. The estate was ordered to be sold, but Thomas Winckley, of Preston, bought it and handed it back to Hodgson when he was released. Like the Quakers on the other side of the hill, the owners of Leighton Hall have held fast to their faith and the house is their monument. Such unswerving allegiances have given a state of permanency to the area. One feels less conscious of impending changes hereabouts than anywhere else in Holiday Lancashire.

A mile away from Yealand Conyers is Yealand Redmayne, smaller but hardly less attractive, and then the road sweeps round the wooded slopes and plunges down to the lake at Leighton Moss, already referred to as one of the finest haunts of waterfowl in the north. Some years ago the late H. W. Robinson, the noted Lancashire ornithologist, estimated that over forty different species of wildfowl and waders had been seen there, and today that list is constantly being extended. An osprey remained there for several weeks a few summers ago, and both the marsh harrier and the bittern have been reported in recent years.

Silverdale itself spreads out among crannies in the limestone cliffs and well-wooded bluffs, showing houses that harmonise with their surroundings and gardens with plenty of fine trees. On the branch line to Furness it is more difficult of access than Hest Bank and Bolton-le-Sands, and consequently few of its householders journey to neighbouring towns or distant cities daily. Here then the village is the predominating feature of life, and the Gaskell Hall, with its meetings and concerts, reflects the tenor of its ways.

The name Gaskell Hall is significant, for the celebrated Mrs Gaskell, biographer of Charlotte Brontë and author of *Cranford*, often stayed at Tower House, near the headland called Gibraltar. Silverdale is depicted in some of her works. A later writer, Mr William Riley, author of *Windyridge* and other novels, lives in the village and has described its charms in his book, *The Silver Dale*.

Here, as at Bolton-le-Sands and other villages of the coast, we may see the local inshore fishermen going far out across the marshlands in their horse-drawn carts to the cockle-beds and channels where the shrimps are found. Low tide, of course, exposes the large tracts of green-flecked ooze, and during the winter months the grey geese congregate off the shore.

Silverdale is rightly proud of one of its institutions—a team of handbell ringers which has recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Founded by a former vicar, the Rev W. Sleight, in order to encourage practice in change ringing, it was not long before handbell ringing was becoming so interesting that the custom, still maintained, of making a Christmas tour of the village and ringing carols was commenced. Old minute books provide some interesting insights into those early days when, if local gossip is to be believed, the ringers were hard put to it to struggle through one tune, and even then many listeners failed to recognise it! We learn

that one tour commenced with donations of half-a-crown from the first two households visited, then comes the poignant entry, "Nothing, so didn't play", and after that, "Nothing, all music blown away."

Today this enthusiastic team, which varies in age from comparative youngsters of fourteen to experienced ringers who are now approaching their sixtieth birthday, has as its conductor, Mr Tom Bolton, as enthusiastic a devotee of the art of ringing as can be found anywhere in the land. His job means much more than just taking charge of rehearsals and directing the concert appearances for which the ringers are now in great demand. There are no printed copies of music for handbell ringers, so that each ringer's copy has to be written out by hand. The pieces, too, have to be arranged so as to fit in with the range of bells possessed by the team, and arranging—as well as writing at least fifteen scores in *staff notation*—is one of Tom Bolton's specialities. Today most of the pieces played by the Silverdale ringers are "arranged by Pachillick"—and Pachillick is the pseudonym used by Mr Bolton.

The Silverdale team is one of the few in the country with a complete range of chromatic octaves and over fifty bells. Some of the members will handle as many as four bells, and to see them doing so is to marvel at the dexterity of movement and precision-like timing. Certainly, handbell ringing is no pastime for the sluggard. I had not been at a practice for more than five minutes before I realised that it was quite an energetic pursuit.

Handbells are, of course, expensive items to buy, and the present set is insured for £250. Not only do they cost a deal of money, but replacements are difficult to obtain, so sometime ago a rule was introduced to the effect that any member dropping a bell should be fined sixpence on the spot. And the first to be fined, I was told, was the conductor himself!

Silverdale, then, is more than a pretty village. It is a real live community of folk.

Beyond, there are quiet roads past the border pele of Arnside Tower to Arnside, which stands on the estuary of the Kent, or by way of Beetham to rejoin the A.6 road north. In either case we pass out of Lancashire into Westmorland, into the area so well depicted in the novels of Miss Constance Holme, who lives at Milnthorpe, close at hand. Even inland, however, it is impossible to forget the existence of Morecambe Bay, for, as Miss Holme

herself has pointed out: "In this part of the little county it was hard to get away from the knowledge of the sea, and even further in, among the smouldering peaks, you had only to climb awhile to find the water almost within a throw."

6

Arnside is Westmorland's only port, and the little strip of coast on the south side of the Kent estuary its only seaboard. Yet this coastline has its Admiral, a hereditary title once bestowed upon noblemen whose estates bordered the sea, and who had the task of supervising the coastal defences and, on occasion, to supply both ships and men for the protection of the realm. Lord Hothfield, of Skipton (Yorkshire) and Appleby (Westmorland) Castles, is Hereditary Admiral for the coasts of Westmorland. He is descended from the great Clifford family, and although the estates bordering the Kent long since passed out of his family's possession, he still retains the ancient title.

Beyond the Kent is Lancashire again, and joining the two is a viaduct and long lengths of embankment which carry the railway line between the Westmorland coastal village and the Cartmel peninsula. The viaduct is a piece of remarkable engineering work carried out by Alexander Brogden and James Brunlees a hundred years ago. The soft sands around the Kent presented little in the way of a solid foundation. Hollow iron piles were driven down and water forced down the interior under great pressure. This caused the sand and water to "boil up" inside the piles and they sank with their own weight. Further piles were fixed to the originals and the process continued until the required depth had been reached and a firm foundation assured.

The construction of the viaduct, which was opened in 1847, resulted in a deal of land being reclaimed on either side of the estuary, and, on the north, actually brought about the final settlement of a county boundary which had fluctuated according to the whims and fancies of the River Winster. Now the Winster, which forms the real boundary between Lancashire and Westmorland, was confined to an artificial channel and the little island of Holme, off Grange over Sands, which had been first in the one county and then in the other as the river had flowed on either side of it, became permanently in Lancashire.

We see Holme Island as we approach Grange-over-Sands, a wooded rocky knoll and once the home of the same Alexander Brogden who was so much responsible for fixing its controlling County Council.

Grange over Sands is modern. Indeed, an old guide to *Furness and Cartmel*, published in 1843, dismisses it cursorily as: "A small village to the eastward of Cartmel, on the estuary of the Winster; it is a place of considerable resort for the purpose of sea-bathing." Grange-over-Sands is indeed a product of the last hundred years, and it is still expanding. And its expansion is quite compatible with its beautiful surroundings.

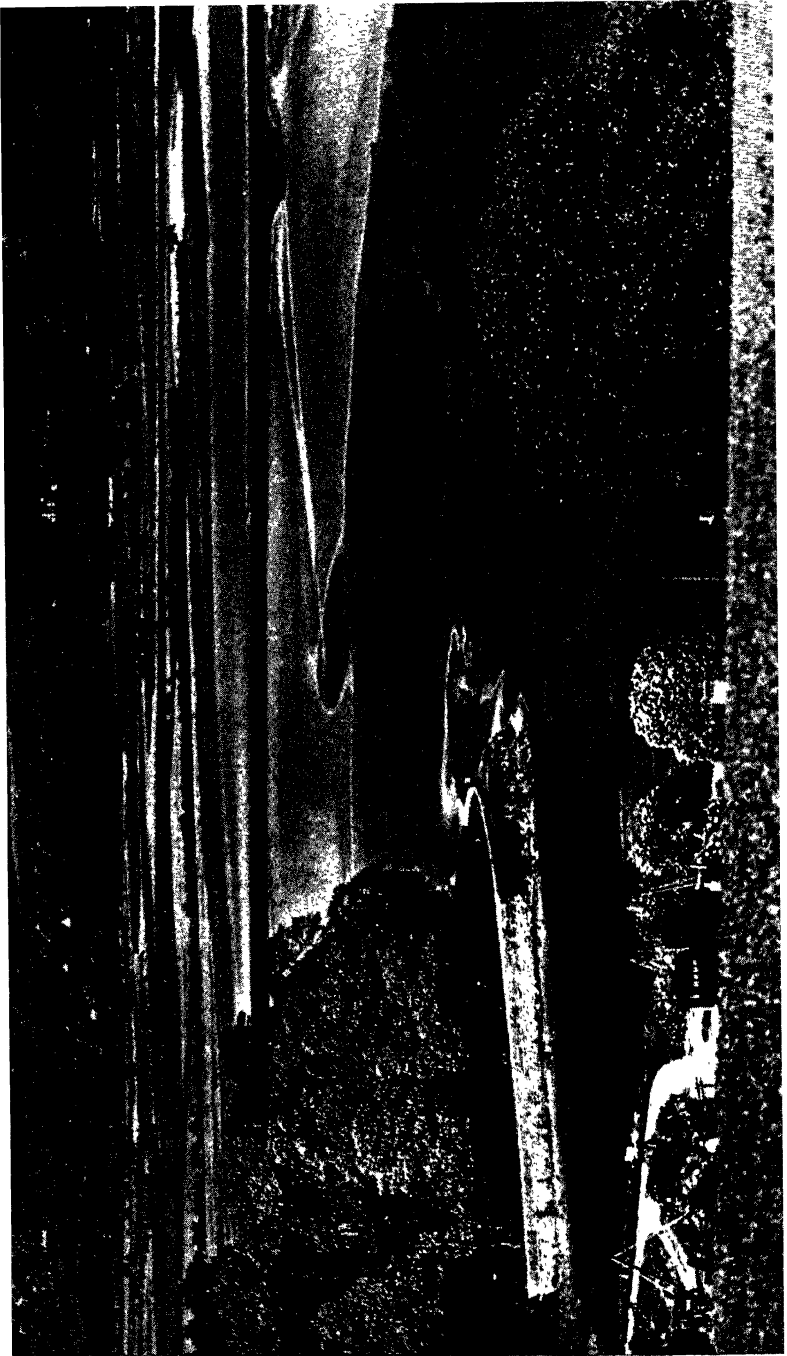
Built about the southern slopes of Hamps Fell, its situation is entirely different from any of the other places about the bay. A glance at the vegetation is in itself sufficient testimony to the mildness of its climate. Bamboos, palms, flowering shrubs that one associates with Devon and Cornwall rather than the Lancashire coast thrive well here.

Grange has always prided itself on its public gardens, and from the first has set out to display itself in beauty of foliage and flower. The fact that the railway runs right along the front might have been sufficient to daunt those concerned with its development on these lines. Yet, early in the present century, one Anthony Benson came here as head gardener, and soon planned an extensive system of rockery and greensward which actually incorporated the railway banks into an effective scheme. When he took over his duties only a few shrubs were dotted about the open spaces. Today Grange, at any time of the year, is a floral delight.

It is, of course, a place primarily concerned with catering for the holiday tastes compatible with its own. By doing so it has also attracted many retired folk to settle permanently in the place. Its resident population is about the 3,000 mark. And the general character of that population can be assessed by the fact that apart from catering for the visitors there is little in the way of other occupation.

Modern as Grange is, there are places around that have made their mark in the story of the Cartmel peninsula. Only a mile or two to the east is Lindale, where John Wilkinson, the great iron-master of the eighteenth century, built the first iron ship (which, to the astonishment of the locals, actually floated in a nearby





tarn) and found the secret of using coke rather than charcoal in the smelting of ore. Wilkinson built a house on Castle Head, a rocky eminence rising abruptly from the flat lands around the Winster, and although his later business activities were connected with Staffordshire rather than North Lancashire, his body was brought back to Lindale for final interment.

In his later years he had superintended the construction of an iron coffin, and this, it is often said, travelled with him wherever he went. He died at Hadley in 1808, and the body was brought to Lindale to a grave in the grounds at Castle Head. The iron coffin was brought separately across the sands, but the party in charge was forced to abandon it on account of the swift incoming tide. The coffin was eventually recovered; the old ironmaster was buried on the hill above the village, and an iron monument erected above the grave.

A later owner of Castle Head, however, objected to the grave in the grounds, and in 1863 Wilkinson's body made another journey—this time towards the local church, where it was placed under the Castle Head pew.

The monument was also removed from Castle Head to a place in the village. It still stands—a memorial to one who did so much in the interests of the British iron industry, and whose eccentric wishes concerning the disposal of his own body continued to excite attention long after the inventive spirit within had been stilled.

West from Grange the limestone cliff of Humphrey Head, the highest on the Lancashire coast, thrusts out into the bay. Here, tradition avers, the last wild wolf in England was slain by a local squire in the reign of Edward I. There are, of course, many other places in England making the same claim. More reliable records show that wolves were still extant in Northern England until the end of the fifteenth century. And in his *Fell Days*, Graham Sutton tells of one, an escape of course, being killed in Cumberland so recently as 1906.

Beyond Humphrey Head, and facing the entrance to the Leven estuary, is Flookburgh, already mentioned in connexion with the shellfish gatherers of Morecambe Bay. Flookburgh looks old and Flookburgh is old. Its first market charter was granted by the Prior of Cartmel so early as 1278, and both Henry IV and Charles II confirmed the grant. Its cockle trade is, of course, declining, but

there are good farmlands on the reclaimed marshes beside the Leven.

Inland is Holker Hall, since 1756 the residence of the Cavendish family and a beautiful example of an English country home, open to the public on certain days during the summer months. It was built by the Prestons, who were given lands north of Morecambe Bay after the dissolution of the monasteries, in the early seventeenth century, but was virtually rebuilt after a big fire in 1871 which destroyed much of the interior and a great proportion of its collection of valuable pictures.

A sheltered valley continues to Cartmel, a real treasure in stone and with a collection of houses grouped about its big priory church. Just when the first church was built here does not seem to be known, but many say that it was in the seventh century and soon after St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne had received from the King of Northumbria "the land called Cartmel with all the Britons in it".

In the twelfth century William de Mareschal, later Earl of Pembroke, gave lands hereabouts to the Canons Regular of St Augustine who founded the priory. The establishment, although always somewhat overshadowed by the older and more powerful house of the Cistercian monks at Furness, on the other side of the Leven, prospered well enough. There were, of course, times of trouble, as when the armies of Robert the Bruce raided the area and rendered many of its possessions valueless. Perhaps as time went on life in such a secluded and desirable vale encouraged laxities. Henry VIII's commissioners had little difficulty in trumping up sufficient charges for the community to be dissolved with the "lesser monasteries" in 1537.

As usual, many of its buildings served as a quarry for those in search of ready-dressed stone, but the actual church remained intact. It was the parish church of the district as well as that of the canons. But for years it remained roofless and in an appalling state of neglect. George Preston, of Holker Hall, came to its rescue in 1618. An inscription dated 1640 tells how this man "out of his zeal to God at his own great charge repaired this Church being in great decay with a new roof of timber and beautified it within very decently with fret plaster work and adorned ye chancel with curiously carved woodwork and placed therein a pair of organs of great value".

The "curiously carved woodwork" referred to was the upper parts of the original canon's seats in the choir. Built of black oak, they are now, three hundred years after, regarded as among the finest in Europe. They blend perfectly with the older woodwork of the seats, which are complete with the quaint misericordes of the monastic time. The screen, too, had perished in the years of neglect, the upper part having fallen into a state of extreme decay. This, too, was replaced by George Preston with one of believed Flemish workmanship.

George's son, Thomas, was responsible for the provision of many of the fine collection of books in the priory library. Here, in addition to various theological works, is a first edition of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*. Once this was stolen and hawked about New York without success before it was recognised and restored to its rightful place. Close at hand is a large parochial umbrella which for some two hundred years was used by successive vicars of Cartmel when performing outside duties.

The interior of Cartmel Priory is as interesting as that of any church in the North of England, and the outside fabric is no less attractive. The tower is unique in that the belfry is set diagonally upon the lantern.

The priory gatehouse also escaped destruction. From 1624 to 1790 it was used as a grammar school, and then it entered into one of those periods when no one seemed to find a use for it. Rapidly falling into a state of disrepair, it was purchased by the late Mr R. O'Neill Pearson in 1920, who set about its restoration. The glories of ancient Cartmel have never lacked their benefactors. In 1946 Mr Pearson's sons presented it to the National Trust.

Through the archway of the gatehouse one enters Cartmel square, complete with eighteenth-century market cross and where the local packs of foxhounds meet from time to time in the winter months. From it a passage leads to Cartmel racecourse, used for meetings under National Hunt rules every Whitsuntide, and where the August show of the Cartmel Agricultural Society has been held since 1872.

From Cartmel a road leads through Field Broughton to the foot of Windermere. Others climb across the hills to Grange, by way of Cartmel Fell to the Winster Valley, and about the fell country on the fringe of the Lake District. Here agriculture is the main

occupation of the countryfolk, and hounds and their ways their abiding passion. Hardly a farm fails to possess either its foxhounds "at walk" during the summer months or other hounds being trained for the local sport of hound trailing. It would be difficult to find a grander set of sportsmen than these folk of the Cartmel peninsula. And sport to them means something to do with hounds.

In winter this usually resolved itself into following one of the packs of fell foxhounds which come into this area, hounds which are always followed on foot with a style of hunting that is as different as chalk from cheese from that carried on in other parts of the country. Perhaps the most important difference is in the manner of hounds working. Many of the woodlands, naturally, harbour their foxes, but more often than not a fell fox will be lying somewhere on the open slopes of the hills. It is hunted from what is called the drag, the scent left behind, often some hours before, by some prowling raider. Frequently enough this drag is followed for a considerable time before the fox is unkennelled. Woodcock Graves put the whole business in a nutshell when he wrote, in his celebrated song about John Peel: "From a drag to a chase, from a chase to a view".

The hounds used in fell hunting, too, differ in many respects from those used in the more lowland areas. Light boned and long in the back, they are well equipped for hunting over the steep-sided hills, with innumerable drystone walls to be crossed during a lengthy hunt, and trained to kill foxes.

Hunting of this kind has been developed on a long-standing friendship between farmers and the hunt. Indeed, it is more than a sport; it is the only means of keeping the fell fox under anything approaching a state of control.

Three and sometimes four days a week from early autumn to late spring the hounds are out in some part of the area; even when organised "meets" have come to an end the packs are still kept intact, and the huntsman is ready to go to any farm where lamb-worrying by foxes is reported. Hunting over, the hounds go out to the farms, where they spend the weeks of summer.

Some of the older hounds have been accommodated at the same farms for several years, right from puppyhood in fact, so that the farmers concerned feel a kind of proprietorship over them.

In addition to the older hounds, puppies, or "unentered" hounds, enjoy this farm hospitality during the summer. There they lead a natural life of fun and frolic, but at the same time they learn to smell, to negotiate the drystone walls, and get used to the ways of the various animals of the farm. This latter is very important. A hound that developed sheep-worrying tendencies—and fortunately such are few and far between—would soon have to be destroyed.

The farmers also assist during the actual hunting season. An early start is necessary in order to catch fell foxes, and with a wide area to be covered the huntsman's life is a roving one. Hounds and huntsmen receive accommodation at different farms in the district. Any fell huntsman would be the first to point out the services given by these farming hosts, a form of service not reflected in any balance sheet but without which the work of the fell packs just could not go on.

When actually out with hounds the attire of these North Lancashire folk would, I am aware, surprise those accustomed to the hunts in more fashionable places. There is no question of looking smart; thick undergrowth in the woodlands and sharp outcrops of rock on the fells are not likely to pay the slightest respect to clothes. But see those same followers and their ladies at the balls which nearly every hamlet and village arranges to support the hunts, and you will realise that smart attire is by no means foreign to the North Lancashire social function.

There are two packs hunting Lancashire north of the sands. The older, kennelled outside the actual district, is the Coniston, which, according to *Baily's Hunting Directory* (that indispensable guide of all hunting enthusiasts), "dates from the year 1825 when it was founded at Coniston by Mr Gasgarth (great-great-uncle of the present Master, Mr R. Logan) and Mr Jackson as a trencher-fed pack to run fox, mart, and hare". The other pack is the North Lonsdale, which was formed so recently as 1948. It takes a period of time to build up a strong pack of fell foxhounds, and it is largely to the credit of the Master, Major J. Ulf Machell, of Pennybridge Hall, near Ulverston, that so workmanlike a pack as the North Lonsdale now possesses has been developed in so short a spell.

With such a love of hunting and hounds it is not surprising that for the chief summer sport the local folk turn to a form of hound

rating, known as hound trailing, which is based on the hound's capacity for scenting and its powers of stamina and speed.

No sport ever devised had simpler rules, so much so that a visitor attending his first hound trail soon feels quite at home. Briefly, the idea is that the hounds follow a laid trail of aniseed, turpentine, and paraffin for some ten miles across the slopes of the fells, the first hound to complete the circuit being the winner. Nothing could be more simple, but, as is so often the case, the simpler a thing appears to be, the more there is behind the surface, concealed from everyman's gaze.

Just when the idea of sending out hounds to follow a trail laid across the hills first originated no one seems to know, but doubtless it had its birth when one huntsman would claim that his puppies had better "noses" than those of the rival packs and a suitable test would be devised to find out the truth or otherwise of this boast.

From this, regular competitions developed as a matter of course, and, in time, hound-trailing, as it was called, became a recognised sport of its own. Now it is governed by the Hound Trailing Association, which has a full-time secretary and an official code of rules, and during the course of a season between £7,000 and £10,000 will be paid out in prize money. Roughly, the area coming under the jurisdiction of the Association lies between Morecambe Bay and the Solway to south and north, and the Irish Sea and the Pennine hills to west and east, so that a great slice of North Lancashire is included in the territory; and during the hound-trailing "season", which lasts from Easter to the end of October, never a week passes without one or more trails being organised in the Furness and Cartmel areas.

These meetings are all well advertised and, of course, every villager knows where they will be held. All one has to do is to follow the crowd, for these hound-lovers come from far and near—by motor car, cycle, even horse-and-trap, and, of course, on foot.

But long before the first spectators have arrived on the scene, the two trail "layers" have been taken out by car to some place five miles away and then, each working in opposite directions, they drag their cloths well soaked in the aniseed mixture over the ground, as they make their way back to the starting point. And usually the trail includes a multitude of drystone walls, varying in

height from four to six feet, to be crossed—a fitting test of endurance as well as speed.

The whole course has been carefully worked out in advance, and arranged in such a way that while obstacles, such as drystone walls, are plentiful, any that would give unfair advantage to the leading hound or are likely to cause damage to pads and coats are avoided. Scouts patrol the route while the trail is on to make sure that no hound is assisted by picking it up in some car and then releasing it farther along the course—practices that were by no means unknown in the days before the rules were tightened up considerably.

One must, of course, admit that betting plays a great part in maintaining the popularity of the sport today, but every bookmaker must himself be a member of the Hound Trailing Association, and be responsible to the council for any breach of recognised procedure. To stroll round the field before an important trail is to see just as much excitement as before the start of a big race on the flat. Personally, I always find the names of the hounds displayed on the bookmakers' stands even more fascinating than the odds—Lawless, Diddler, Randale, and the rest; names that are resplendent in the magic of the hound world. There is a fascination, too, in watching the trainers massaging their charges before the trail begins. Some of the hounds receive a trim and shampoo within half an hour of the time of starting. More than one trainer has spoken of the invigorating effect of this beauty treatment on a hound due to commence a hard race.

These preliminaries over, each competing hound is dabbed with some colouring matter so that the judge will know that it has gone the complete course, and then the runners stand on the starting line. The first trail layer comes forward, lifting his drag as he nears the hounds; his colleague waits until the race has commenced before he comes in, otherwise there would be danger of hounds commencing in the wrong direction.

The starter's white flag comes down. The line of hounds surges forward and the crest of a brown, black, lemon and white wave rises as the first of the stone walls is crossed. Then it becomes harder to recognise individual hounds, and as the trail continues these change into the blurred white specks that will continue to contour the fell slopes for the next half hour. Sometimes they disappear in some gully; then they come into view again. Now, of

course, the line begins to spread out, and, as the final slopes are reached, it again becomes possible for the experts at any rate to recognise individual hounds.

Only the judge and his assistants can stand on the actual finishing line. The owners are further back. The hounds come within earshot and a pandemonium breaks out among their owners and trainers. Hounds' names are yelled; piercing whistles tear the air. As the hounds approach, the din increases and tin boxes containing food are displayed. The first hound crosses the line. The judge points it out and a "catcher" follows it to its owner. When hounds are bunched at the finish, as is often the case, it needs a quick eye to distinguish one from the other. There is, not unnaturally, what seems to be a deal of confusion, but the hounds themselves are quite unruffled and tails wag as noses are buried in the tins of food.

The contents of those tins are interesting. They vary a deal, but rabbit seems the most popular diet. However, I have seen tripe, chicken, and even iced cake being served, so that it would appear that the trail hound is just as fastidious about its food as either track athlete or professional boxer.

Scenes such as this are commonplace among these hills of North Lancashire, and there, with the hounds as a common source of interest, farmers and shipyard workers, holiday makers and retired folk of the countryside are gathered together. One hears much about the gap between the countryman's and the townsman's outlook, but hound trailing bridges the gap about as thoroughly as any sport I know.

7

The River Leven forms a boundary between the lands of Cartmel and those of Furness. It is spanned by another of those embankments and viaducts engineered by Brogden and Brunlees. As at Arnside, a foundation was secured by the use of hollow metal piles. The Leven proved even more difficult to bridge than the Kent. The sand extended to a depth of thirty feet in most places; in others it reached seventy feet.

At low tide the Leven estuary reveals a wide expanse of sand, with the river coming with all the turbulence of a mountain stream through its centre. High tide, however, causes a sheet of

water to expand up to the foot of the hills on either side, making a glorious vista of blues, greens, purples, and browns. Below the viaduct and facing the open sea, Chapel Island either shows as a little oasis of green, crowned with a few trees, in the middle of the sands, or rides like an old-time sailing ship with its canvas fully unfurled above the waters. Wordsworth refers to it in his famous *Prelude*:

Upon a small
And rocky island near, a fragment stood
(Itself like a sea rock) the low remains
(With shells encrusted dark with briny weeds)
Of a dilapidated structure, once
A Romish Chapel, where the vested priest
Said matins at the hour that suited those
Who crossed the sands with ebb of morning tide.

The reference is to the fact that the canons of nearby Conishead Priory, on the Furness side, had a chapel there, and one of their number regularly attended to say prayers for those engaged in the crossing of the sands. The ruins are visible from the viaduct and from the shore, but of these the original chapel comprises but a fragment. The rest are of much later date. They were placed there by a local landowner just over a century ago who, as the result of a flight of fancy difficult to understand, added sham "ruins" which dwarfed those of the old-time erection.

Ulverston, on the Furness side of the estuary and whose name, Dr Whitaker suggests, implies the "ton", or town, of a Saxon chief, Ulpha, has, like Lancaster, played a dual role of market town and shipping centre. Returns of the mid-eighteenth century give a total of 231 ships, mainly engaged in the coasting trade, anchoring about the Furness shore, and a busy line of quays extended from the seaward side of Ulverston up the Leven to Greenodd. Between £150,000 and £200,000 worth of minerals and merchandise was sent out from the estuary every year. This shipping trade has long since departed, and the mile-long canal, leading from the centre of the town to the Leven channel and opened in 1796, is no longer used.

The departure of its shipping interests, which managed to linger until the time of the First World War, left Ulverston a market town, but in recent years several light industries have been

developed on the outskirts of the town and there is a general air of well-being about the place.

The hills of Furness step down from the greater heights of Lakeland proper to the edge of the town, and on the last important spur, Hoad Hill, is a mock lighthouse erected to the memory of Sir John Barrow, born on the outskirts of the town in 1764 and who died in 1848. After explorations in China and South Africa he turned his attention to the Arctic, where his name is commemorated by such place-names as Point Barrow and Barrow Straits. He held office as Secretary to the Admiralty from 1804 to within five years of his death, and was one of the founders of the Royal Geographical Society. No wonder that Disraeli once described him in Parliament as "a man of unrivalled power".

Although the lighthouse has never sent forth its warning beam to shipping, a condition of its building in 1850 was that it should be constructed so as to be available as such should the need arise, and it was on account of this that the Elder Brethren and Corporation of Trinity House made a large contribution towards the cost.

Not far from the town is the Tudor mansion of Swarthmoor Hall, the home of Judge and Margaret Fell, already referred to in connexion with the early days of the Quaker movement. George Fox was a regular visitor here, and after the death of the judge, Margaret became Mrs Fox, and a deal of administrative work in connexion with the movement was transacted here. Margaret was buried in a nameless grave at Sunbrick, not far away. An inscription on a piece of natural rock in this Quaker burial ground recalls the fact and gives the date as 1702. Near the Hall itself is the Friends' Meeting House which was erected by George Fox in 1688, and is resorted to by Quakers from all parts of the world.

Perhaps Ulverston station is better known to the holiday maker than the town itself, for in the summer months the branch line to Lakeside, at the southern foot of Windermere, is open and tourists make a round trip which includes a sail along England's largest lake. Midway between is Greenodd, with its old quays still in position, but now a quiet little resort much favoured by fisherfolk.

Here, indeed, we are on the verge of Lakeland proper, with a wealth of scenery around. The Crake Valley leads away towards Coniston Water; a little farther along is the Rusland Valley, once

noted for its mines, and even for an illegal mint, but now a place of peace and quietude; and, of course, the Leven itself leads to Newby Bridge and Lakeside, at the very entrance to the glories of Lakeland.

West from Ulverston runs the main road to Barrow, a road running through the heart of lower Furness. Here the local hæmatite, or red oxide, iron ore was worked for many centuries. Bruce and his Scottish raiders, coming from a land not unduly rich in mineral ores, found it so much to their liking that Holinshed records, in his *Chronicle*, that "they seized all the manufactured iron they could find, and carried it off with the greatest joy though so heavy of carriage, and preferred it to all other plunder."

The best ores contained some 70 per cent of iron, and the interesting feature, from a geological point of view, is that it is found in deposits rather than as veins. Charles Jopling, in his *Furness and Cartmel*, 1843, describes the method of obtaining it.

"Shafts," he says, "are sunk near the supposed position of the ore, or levels are driven to it. In the shafts, the ore is raised to the surface by means of buckets or kibbles; it is then thrown into a barrow and wheeled to a heap, where it is afterwards picked over. The quantity annually exported has been stated to amount to 75,000 tons."

A later writer, Mr William White, whose *Furness Folk and Facts* was published about twenty years ago, says that in the mid-nineteenth century the ore was carried by carts through the streets of Ulverston, and "at this time it was not unusual to see our streets a deep Indian-red colour from the droppings of the ore from the carts".

Gradually, however, the working of hæmatite dwindled, as the industry slowly exhausted itself. One mine, the Newton at Dalton, persisted until the closing years of the last war, but by that time the industry had all but flickered out, and the populations of the old mining towns and villages had turned to the shipyards in Furness for employment.

Nature has done much to cover the scars left behind by the old workings. One sees an undulating countryside of fields and occasional outcrops or minor scars of red. But the small towns and villages—Lindal, Dalton, and the rest of them—have changed little in outward appearance, however much the mode of life of

their inhabitants has been altered. And it is the outward appearance we notice as we travel along the wide road to Barrow.

Dalton, however, displays an older link with history in its fine-looking pele tower, which was formerly the gatehouse of the powerful Cistercian monastery of Furness, and is now used as a place where local organisations hold meetings and lectures. To speak to an audience inside those thick walls and in a room with medieval armour and trappings displayed around is quite a unique experience!

On the outskirts of Barrow itself are the ruins of the abbey. Set in a dale known as the Vale of Deadly Nightshade, where the redness of earth and rock contrast with the greenery of close-cropped lawn and spreading trees, the ruins themselves are of the native red sandstone, which wears so well an ecclesiastical air of solemnity yet makes scant stand against the vagaries of the weather.

Furness Abbey has been described by Mr Norman Nicholson, in the County volume on *Cumberland and Westmorland*, as "a textbook abbey, a large-scale model for the student, extensive, well preserved, and with all accessories—chapter house, cloisters, infirmary, even drains and sewage system", and I can think of nothing more apt. The weather may have erased some of its more elaborate ornamentations, although one suspects that these were never very numerous, but sufficient detail remains to show it in its true status. A Nazi bomb, aimed for the nearby town, hit the hotel a hundred yards away, a building also of the same red sandstone, and for a time added to the ruins in the valley, but left the older ones intact.

Furness was founded as a Benedictine abbey by Stephen, Earl of Bologne and later King of England, as a daughter house of the monastery of Savigny, in Normandy, in 1127. Forty years afterwards Savigny adopted the Cistercian rule, and, after a show of protest, Furness was ordered to follow suit under the threat of the excommunication of its abbot.

The change, reluctantly as it came about, was one of paramount importance. The Cistercians were not only concerned with religious devotions but also with the development of mining and agriculture. There was a rich field for work in the Furness country. Under the influence of the monks the ores of the neighbourhood were worked; whole hillsides were denuded of their

timber to make charcoal for smelting purposes, and on the cleared hillsides sheep farms, or "herdwycks" as they were then called, were established. Sheep farming, indeed, became one of the most lucrative sources of income for the establishment.

There was much scope for work nearer the abbey itself. Furness was wild, covered with scrub, and, in many places, little more than a marshy swamp. The Cistercian agriculturists knew a deal about land reclamation. They instituted a system of drains to clear off surplus water. They used lime, marl, peat, and sea-sand to improve the fertility of the soil. For two hundred years this work continued, and Furness has never ceased to benefit therefrom.

Of course, there were the usual squabbles associated with any monastic establishment of size, but successive abbots of Furness seem to have been endowed with a shrewdness in bargaining and a tenacity to stick to possessions once under their control. Even the all-powerful Baron of Kendal was, early in the monastery's career, forced to make concessions over land ownership on the Furness fells, concessions which left the abbot with all the status of a great feudal lord. There were disputes with the Priory of St Mary's at Lancaster concerning fishing rights in the Lune, and with the abbot of the powerful Cistercian abbey at Fountains, near Ripon, in Yorkshire, over farmlands in Borrowdale. In these Furness managed to secure settlements more satisfactory to themselves than to their rivals. The nearer establishments at Conishead and Cartmel were soon compelled to recognise the suzerainty of their more powerful and richer neighbour.

By the time of Edward III the abbot of Furness was supreme in his dominions. Yet his rule was far from being that of a despot. True, the tenants of the monastic farms and granges had to pay their "fines", or admission fees, on taking over their holdings, and had to guarantee service in the event of Scottish or other invasion, but in return they received supplies of ale and bread each week, could send their children to the monastic school without charge, and had supplies of iron for their ploughs, and manure if they were close to the abbey, or seaweed if they lived near the shore, for their fields. They possessed turbury rights to dig for fuel and wood-cutting rights to secure timber for their buildings. On the whole their lot was a particularly happy one, especially as they enjoyed security of tenure.

The changes brought about as the result of the Wars of the Roses are often overlooked when we summarise the economic history of England. In Furness they were keenly felt. Many of the big houses and halls changed hands. The newly created Earls of Derby, who were given possessions hereabouts, are described as members of an "upstart new nobility". Old-established traditions and customs meant little to the newcomers. Even the abbot's authority was often questioned, and even successfully challenged in the courts of law. All this coincided in a general change of agriculture from the old arable cultivations to the grazing of stock. Tenants of the newcomers were encouraged to make the change; those of Furness Abbey were not. The question of money entered largely into the monastic decisions.

The result was an aftermath of discontent, and even open rebellion among those whose forebears had so happily farmed under the old order. The discontent spread to the abbey itself. And it continued to grow so much that when Henry VIII cast his covetous eyes on the monastic possessions there were many in the Vale of Deadly Nightshade willing to place before his Commissioners the very sort of information they desired. The last abbot, Roger Pele, was totally unlike his predecessors who had built so well and so soundly. He was uncertain, playing first with one side and then the other; making payments which were little other than bribes to Thomas Cromwell that were out of all proportion to the revenues. His final voluntary surrender of Furness—the first of the larger monasteries to be dissolved—was the culminating act of a career as undistinguished and unsound as that of any abbot in the land. His reward for all this was the rectory of Dalton. And soon afterwards the lands attached to Furness passed into the possession of the Duchy of Lancaster.

There may be an analogy between the events which led to the breakdown of monastic power and brought about a revolution in the life of the countryside and those of recent years. In time the "upstart new nobility" developed a tradition of its own. And it was a totally honourable tradition. Now once more we are witnessing the breakdown of old-established estates and the setting up of a new order. Few can deny that the countryside seems a deal poorer for the change. It may be that time will smooth things out and that established traditions will prove stronger than current ways. We, and generations to come, can only wait—hopefully.

There is another road from Ulverston to Barrow, a road which hugs the Furness shore and fits better within the framework of a chapter on Morecambe Bay. Beyond Ulverston it passes Conishead Priory, with a convalescent home for Durham miners replacing the old house of the canons. This was erected on the site by one Colonel Braddyll in a style doubtless inspired by the architect's conception of a monastic building. Farther along is Bardsea, a bonny coastal village with a discerning clientele of holiday makers and no trace at all of the hospital founded by the Knights of St John of Jerusalem.

Westward the road runs along a lonely shore, with the sea receding to uncover a vast area of wet sand—once fields and woods—and with the village of Fordebottle some distance south of the present road. A tidal wave of 6th December, 1553, overwhelmed all these and changed the topography of the Furness shore. As the result of that same great storm Hert Island, in the same vicinity, disappeared for ever.

High tide today brings the sound of sea music, as the waves meet the shingle beach. It is a section of the Lancashire coast all too rarely visited, but one of infinite charm. Behind it are low hills commanding views of a distance only broken by the peaks of the Lake District to the north and the heights of the Pennine and Bowland fells beyond the great sweep of the bay.

At Rampside we are at the entrance to the Barrow Channel, with quite an archipelago of small islands between the mainland and the tip of Walney. The nearest, Roe Island, is, like Holme, off Grange, connected with the mainland by an embankment. It has all the air of a minor port, complete with customs station and lifeboat. From it one goes by boat to Piel Island, of which Gerarde wrote in his quaint account of the birth of the barnacle goose.

Piel Castle, the old "Pile of Foudrey (Foudrey was the former name of the island) looks arresting. It was built by one of the abbots of Furness in the early fourteenth century as a protection for the chief harbour of the parts. Unofficially it was used by the community for smuggling in illegal cargoes, mainly from the Isle of Man, where Rushen was a daughter abbey, and Ireland. Henry IV grew suspicious and took possession, but the abbot had cunningly removed the roof to make it inhospitable. In the end Furness furtively took over again, and the smuggling trade

continued. Connivance in that trade was one of the things cited against the last abbot, Roger Pele.

In 1487 Lambert Simnel, somewhat too thinly veiled as one of the two princes murdered by Richard III to make his claim in the least bit convincing, landed with an army of German and Irish mercenaries in what was surely the most futile of all attempts to depose an English monarch. Foolishly, some of the Furness noblemen went to his aid. Simnel's army was easily defeated at Stoke, in the Midlands, and one of the results of the abortive campaign was the change in ownership of some of the local estates already referred to.

For some four hundred years the anchorage off Piel remained the most important of the Furness shore, but the deepening of the channel and the opening of the docks took the trade to Barrow. So recently as 1843 Charles Jopling was still able to describe it as "a seaport in the harbour of Pile", but little more than twenty years later the influence of the Furness railway had resulted in a great extension of its shipping. Trade formerly focused on Morecambe was switched across the bay to Barrow. Rapidly its population increased, and the decade, 1861-1871, saw a six-fold multiplication. Two docks, the Devonshire and the Buccleuch, were soon working, and by 1873 an iron shipbuilding company had commenced operations, with works on Barrow Island. Since then Barrow has turned to the building and the repair of ships rather than trading by sea. Its ship-repairing yards are without superior in the world.

Into this trade came the men who had formerly worked the iron mines of neighbouring Furness. They still cling to the time-honoured links of the area with iron and ships. Good trade means prosperity to the folk for miles around. A period of depression has every bit as wide an effect.

Rapid growth, however, has not resulted in the development of a typical industrial town. Indeed, I commend Barrow as an example of good planning. Its streets are broad and wide; its principal buildings reflective of good architectural taste. Only when one nears the leaden sleeve of sea that separates it from Walney Island does one come into close contact with industry. Always there is something thrilling about the sight of ships being made. Things about speak of strength and solidity. To a Furness man they reflect pride in the craftsmanship and engineering skill of his kinsfolk.

Barrow has spilled itself across the narrow strait. Many of the workers in its shipyards live at Vickerstown, and twice each day cross the bridge that joins Walney Island with the mainland. Time was when the now deep channel could be crossed on foot.

Walney Island, now ten miles long and rather less than a mile across at its widest point, can be said to constitute the lungs of Barrow. Apart from Vickerstown, which continues to spread, there is no other place of size, and the winds straight from the Irish Sea come unchecked across the open spaces. Walney, however, is a good example of the changing topography of the Lancashire coastline. The great storm of 1553 resulted in the loss of many acres, and the abbot of Furness erected dykes to stem the winter seas. Even so, there were further losses of land in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Today the sea still nags at the western shore. One realises the force of it as one stands on Biggar Bank, facing the Irish Sea. On a day of strong wind the roar of the waves as they meet the shingle can be heard about the island. To balance this, sandhills have accumulated near the northern point and arrested the loss; the southern tip, too, has extended in the last century. The lighthouse at Haws Point, built by the Commissioners of the Port of Lancaster in 1789 and still coming under their jurisdiction, originally stood on the edge of the sea. Now it is some way inland.

This south part of the island has long been visited by naturalists on account of the nesting sea birds. There are records of a considerably sized colony of black-headed gulls there nearly two hundred years ago, and, of course, the birds may well have been there long before that; in recent times its size has been estimated at about 1,500 pairs. Herring gulls have also become well established in the last century, and, according to Mr Clifford Oakes's authoritative *Birds of Lancashire*, the population of nesting lesser black-backed gulls has grown from six pairs in 1926 to some five hundred pairs in 1947.

More interesting nesting birds, however, are the terns. Sandwich terns have bred there since the middle of the last century, but the numbers have been subject to many fluctuations through persecution and the predatory habits of the gulls. Nevertheless, the birds still continue to breed on the island. The common tern has also shown similar fluctuations, being entirely absent for a time

in the First World War; and the Arctic tern is also present in fair numbers. Mr Oakes has pointed out the fact that many nests are near, or even below, high-water mark, and that this causes losses every summer.

Walney, too, makes a contribution to botany by being the home of a prostrate form of cranesbill, or geranium, the *Geranium lancastriense*, which grows among the sandhills. The late Reginald Farrer, pioneer of the modern form of rock gardening, described it in one of his early catalogues as "a most lovely flat-growing plant from Walney", and it has now become an established favourite among those who practise the cult he did so much to popularise.

It was near the northern tip of the island, on one of those winter days when the heights of Lakeland wore their robes of ermine, that I found another occupation of some of the men of Walney—that of shepherding wintering sheep. About a thousand of these animals come down from the hills of the Lake District and even the distant Pennines to spend the months from the middle of October to the beginning of April. For centuries it has been the custom to move the ewe lambs, or gimmer hogs as they are called in these parts, and shearling ewes, probably carrying their first lambs, away from the hills to more sheltered regions for their first winter, and so give them a start in life which counteracts a lot of ills in later years.

Two shepherds were in charge of the Walney flocks, which need just as careful attention in winter as they do on their native hills at other times of the year. Here, as on the Ribble marshes east of Lytham, I found attention to the tide-table and the direction of the prevailing wind of paramount importance. A thirty-foot tide and a strong wind together can easily spell disaster to sheep feeding on the marshlands that stretch out towards the entrance to the channel. Often the deep gullies and runnels are filled with water two hours before the tide reaches its height, and any sheep that have not been brought to the safety of somewhat higher ground would be in danger of being stranded and drowned.

Even a normal tide can cause havoc. Only a short while back about a hundred hogs crossed the flats at low tide to a patch of good grazing. They were caught by the incoming waters as they returned, and the sheep were swept away. Such disasters are rare,

but they indicate why shepherding is to be found among the occupations of the men of Walney Island.

The north tip of Walney looks towards the hills of Lakeland. The sheep serve as a link between the two. In the opposite direction is the wide opening to Morecambe Bay, with the holiday shore beyond. We turn to the sheep. We think of the development of the textile towns of the interior of the country, to whose inhabitants those fortnights beside the Irish Sea mean so much. Considered in such terms, a flock of sheep on an island assumes a new and important significance, and becomes an almost essential component of the story of Holiday Lancashire.

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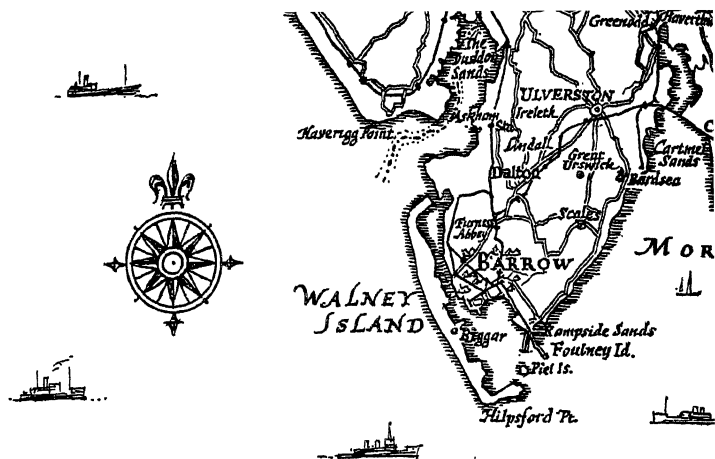
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THE IRISH SEA



INDEX

- A6 road, 110, 134, 137, 181, 182, 186,
190
Admiral of the Westmorland coast,
191
Agricola, 141
Ainsdale, 10, 19-24, 25, 31
Ainsworth, Harrison, 117
Almondbury, 57
Alsop, William, 10-13, 15
Alt, River, 1, 10, 25
Anderson, Miss V., 157
Annals of Southport, 5
Armagh, Archbishop of, 173
Arnside, 145, 146, 153, 156, 190, 191,
200
Arrowsmith, Edmund, 117
Arthur, King, 30
Ashton, Lord, 50, 136
—, William, 4
Ashton Hall, 103, 135
Askew, Agnes, 120
Asparagus growing, 1, 26-28
Assheton family, 35

Bacup, 168
Badsworth, 3
Baines, Edward, 29, 106-107, 179
Baith-haven Buoy, 100
Banister, Rev. J. D., 95
Bankruptcy Act, 1869, 121
Banks, 29, 31
Banks, John, 40
— of Blackpool, 71, 72
Bannockburn, Battle of, 133, 142
Bardsea, 207
Bare, 138, 150, 163, 168, 181
Barrow, Sir John, 202
—, J., and Son, 52-54
Barrow Channel, 207
— Island, 208
Barrow-in-Furness, 137, 139, 140,
151, 163, 166, 175, 176, 203, 204,
207, 208-209
Barry, Sir John, 32
Bateson, William, 94-95
Bawdeswell Hall, 35
Beauties of England and Wales, 134
Belfast, 79, 176
Bellingham, Sir Robert, 164
Benson, Anthony, 192
Biggar Bank, 209
Bindloss family, 187-188
Birds—
Avocet, 24
Bee-eater, 24
Bittern, 189
Curlew, 23, 92
Dunlin, 23
Geese, 32, 158-162
Gulls, 23, 162, 209
Knot, 23, 24
Lapwing, 23, 92
Marsh Harrier, 189
Osprey, 189
Phalarope, 24
Redshank, 23
Terns, 22, 209-210
Birds of Lancashire (Mitchell), 158-
159, 161
Birds of Lancashire (Oakes), 209-
210
Birds of Liverpool Area, 23
Birkdale, 4
Bispham, 75, 76, 78
Blackburn, 57
Black Combe, 83

INDEX

- Blackpool, 1, 7, 8, 9, 33, 34, 36, 48,
51, 53, 54, 55-75, 78, 81, 95,
140, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169
— autumn illuminations, 64-65, 95
— football team, 65
— Golden Mile, 62-63, 72
— gypsies, 72-74
— piers, 71
— Pleasure Beach, 61, 63-64, 73
— Tower, 2, 55-56, 59, 61-62
— Wheel, 62
— Winter Gardens, 62
Bland, E., 5
Blower, Tom, 156
Bog Hole, 13, 14
Bold-Hoghton, Henry, 7, 9
Bolton, 108
Bolton, Tom, 190
Bolton-le-Sands, 149, 150, 152, 153,
154-155, 181-183, 189
Bond, Francis, 126
Borrowdale, 205
Borwick Hall, 187
Boswell family, 72
Bowland, Forest of, 34-36, 83, 138,
145, 207
—, Trough of, 116
Bracken, Dr Henry, 113, 114
Bradford, 35, 167
Bradyll, Colonel, 207
Bratby, Michael, 160
Britton, John, 134
Brockbank, Miss Elisabeth, 187-188
Brogden, Alexander, 191, 192, 200
Brontë family, 91
Brough Hill fair, 72
Bruce, Robert the, 133, 142, 194,
203
Brunanburgh, Battle of, 177
Brunlees, James, 191, 200
Bulmer, Bertram de, 122
Burrow, Bob, 154-155
Burton, Decimus, 77
Bussels of Penwortham, 2
Cadzow, 35
Camden, 141
Carlisle Natural History Society, 160
Carnforth, 137, 151, 181, 183-184
Carpenter, H., 35
Carter family (Kent Sands' Guides),
146
Cartmel, 142, 145, 194-195
— Fell, 195
— Peninsula, 96, 191, 192-200
— Priority, 143, 145, 193, 194-195, 205
Castle Head, 193
Chapel Island, 201
Charles I, 3, 107
Charles II, 3, 109, 119, 120, 134, 193
Charlie, Bonnie Prince, 112-115
Charteris, Col., 110
Chartulary of Cockersand Abbey, 97
Chat Moss, 91
Chester, 130
—, Bishop of, 117
Chetham Society, 97
Chillingham, 35
Churchtown, 5
Civil Wars, 107-109
Clarke, Allen, 74, 95
—, Peter, 111
Clarkson, Thomas, 131
Clegg, John, 22
Cleveleys, 75
Clifford family, 191
Clifton, 37
—, Lady Eleanor Cicily, 48
—, John, 44
—, J. T., 48
—, T. H., 48
Clitheroe, 172
Clougha Pike, 138
Clyde, River, 176
Coaching disasters, 149-150
Cockerham, 96, 108
— Church, 99
Cockersand Abbey, 20, 84, 94, 96-99,
127, 177

INDEX

- Cockfighting, 95
- Conder, River, 103
- Coney Island, 63
- Conishead Priory, 143, 201, 205, 207
- Coniston foxhounds, 197
- Old Man, 138
- Water, 202
- Cook of Blackpool, 71, 72
- Cookson, Thomas, 41, 44
- Crake Valley, 202
- Cromerty, Dias, 166-167, 176, 177
- Cromwell, Oliver, 3, 177, 179, 186
- , Thomas, 206
- Crook-a-Breast Farm, 86-88
- Crook, L., 123
- Crossens, 29, 31
- Crossley, F. H., 126
- Crow Hill, 91
- Croxton Abbey, 96
- Cumberland and Westmorland*, 204
- Cumberland, Duke of, 115
- Cursory Description of Lytham*, 45

- Dalton-in-Furness, 203, 204, 206
- Daltons of Thurnham, 98
- Daly, Charles, 157-158
- Dee, River, 160
- Denham, Capt., 77
- Derby, 113
- , Earls of, 107-109, 206
- Description of Blackpool in Lancashire*, 69-70
- Dickens, Charles, 128, 130-131, 132
- Douglas, 176
- Dumbarton, 172
- Dumfries, 181

- Eccleston, Thomas, 30-31
- Edward II, 133, 142
- Edward III, 142, 205
- Eiffel Tower, 61
- Elizabeth I, 107, 116
- Entwistle, Miss S., 158

- Euston Station, 175
- Evesham, 2, 27
- Evolution of a Coastline*, 4

- Faeroes, 79
- Farrer, Reginald, 210
- Fell, John, 141
- , Judge, 120, 146, 147, 148, 202
- , Margaret, 120-121, 123, 146, 147, 202
- Fell Days*, 193
- Fenton, Dr, 114
- Ffrance, Squire, 90
- Field Broughton, 195
- Fisher, Brenda, 156
- Fisherman, inshore, 31, 152-155, 170-171, 183, 189, 193
- Fishing, deep-sea, 79
- , salmon, 99-100, 177
- Fitz-Roger, Richard, 41, 42
- Fleetwood, 7, 61, 76-80, 81, 92, 102, 139, 163, 175
- Estate Company, 78
- Fishing Company, 79
- Fleetwood, Sir Peter Hesketh, 76, 78
- , Thomas, 30
- Flodden, Battle of, 2
- Flookburgh, 143, 149, 152-153, 155, 193-194
- Flora of West Lancashire*, 22
- Fordebottle, 207
- Formby, 24-28, 31
- Church, 25-26
- family, 25-26
- Point, 1
- Foudrey, Pile of, 161-162, 207
- Fountains Abbey, 205
- Fowler, John, 149-151
- Fox, George, 119-121, 123, 146-148, 187, 202
- Fox Hall, 67
- Fox-hunting, 196-197
- Freckleton, 39-40
- Freshfield, 10, 19, 21

INDEX

- Furness, 83, 96, 137, 138, 141, 145,
 146, 153, 189, 200-211
 — Abbey, 98, 125, 141, 144, 194,
 204-206, 207, 209
Furness and Cartmel, 192, 203
Furness Folk and Facts, 203
 Fylde, 2, 33-54, 67, 73, 74, 75, 80,
 81-83, 125, 132

Gardener's Dictionary, 28
 Garstang, 35-36, 82, 85, 90
 Garth, Hugh de, 96
 Gaskell, Mrs, 189
 Gate, William, 143
 Gaunt, John of, 106, 123
 George VI, 128
 Gerarde, John, 161
 Gibraltar Point, 156-157, 189
 Gillison, Anne, 133
 Gillow, Richard Thomas, 132, 133
 —, Robert, 129, 132
 Gisburne Park, 35
 Glasgow, 181, 184
 — holiday week-end, 56, 60
 Glasshouse farming, 31, 51-54
 Glasson Dock, 101-103, 131, 165, 178
 Grange over Sands, 143, 144, 145, 146,
 149, 150, 192, 195
 Graves, Woodcock, 196
 Gray, Thomas, 152, 164
 Great Eccleston, 74
 Greenodd, 201, 202
 Gregory X, Pope, 97
Guide to the Lakes, 134
 Gunton, 35
 Gurney, Col., 35
 Gypsies, 72-74
Gypsy's Parson, The, 73

 Hadley, 193
 Halifax, 169
 Hall, Rev. George, 73
 Halsall, 2
 Hamilton, Dukes of, 103, 135

 Hamps Fell, 192
 Handbell ringing, 189-190
 Hardy, Eric, 23
 Hartley, Edward, 117
 —, John, 143
 Haws Point, 209
 Hawtin Brothers, 63
 Hayes, T. R., and Sons, 18
 Heaton, 163
 Heaton-with-Oxcliffe, 179
 Helvellyn, 138
 Hemens, Mrs, 144, 145
 Henry IV, 106, 193, 207
 Henry V, 125
 Henry VIII, 116, 143, 194, 206
 Hensall and Sons, 18
 Hert Island, 207
 Hesketh, Bold Fleetwood, 6, 7
 —, Peter, 7, 9, 76-78
 —, Roger Fleetwood, 78
 Hesketh Bank, 29, 31
 Hesketh-Fleetwood, Sir Peter, 76-78
 Heskeths of Rufford, 29
 Hesse, 172
 Hest Bank, 143, 144, 148, 153, 179-
 181, 183, 189
 Hewitson, Anthony, 90
 Heysham, 92, 138, 157, 163, 171-175,
 177, 183
 — Harbour, 175-177
 — Head, 172
 — Lake, 175-176
 — Moss, 177
 — Nettle Beer, 175
 — St. Patrick's Chapel, 172-173
 — Sands, 152
History of the Fylde, 39, 42-43, 48
History of Lancashire, 29, 106-107, 179
History of Pilling, 90, 93
History of Richmondshire, 97-98
History of Southport, 10-13
 Hoad Hill, 202
 Hodgson, Albert, 188
 —, Thomas, 145, 146

INDEX

- Hogarth, Dr Fred, 172
 Holden, George, 94
 Holinshed, 203
 Holker Hall, 194
 Holland, William, 62
 Holme, Miss Constance, 190-191
 Holme Island, 191, 192, 207
 Holmfirth, 57
 Horsebank, 3
 Hothfield, Lord, 191
 Hound trailing, 196, 197-200
 Hubberthorne, Richard, 147, 186-187
 Huddersfield, 168
 Humphrey Head, 145, 193
 Hutton, Dr William, 69-71
- Iceland, 79
 Ingleborough, 138, 145
 Irish Sea, 1, 33, 75, 79, 83, 91, 211
 Isle of Man, 78, 79, 91, 109, 175, 176, 177, 184, 207
 Isleworth, 125-126
- Jackson, W. Travers, 150
 Jacobite Rebellion, 1715, 25, 109-112, 183, 188
 — —, 1745, 112-115, 183
 James I, 117
 James III, 111, 112, 134
 Jenkinson, John and Sons, 86-88
 John, King, 106
 Johnson, Harry, 65
 —, Tom L., 160
 Jopling, Charles, 203, 208
 Jukes, Hal, 151
- Kaye, Reginald, 17
 Keer, River, 141, 148, 150, 155, 157, 184
 Kendal, 102, 134, 181, 185
 —, Barons of, 205
 Kent, River, 137, 141, 142, 144, 145, 148, 151, 155, 157, 190, 191, 200
- Kent Sands Guides, 143-151
 Kents Bank, 146
 Kilgromel, 49
 King's Own Royal Regiment, 127
 Kirkham, 36, 37, 48
 Kitson family, 185
 Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem, 94
 Knott End, 81-82
- Lac, Sir Lancelot de, 30
 Lacy, Roger de, 83
Lakeland Natural History, 160
 Lakeside, 202, 203
 Lancashire Witches, 117-118
 Lancaster, 33, 82, 90, 96, 101, 102, 104-136, 137, 138, 141, 142, 145, 149, 157, 164, 165, 166, 179, 181, 201
 — Castle, 6, 105-125, 148
 — churches, 133-134
 —, Dukes of, 106-107, 128, 141, 206
 — *Gazette*, 102, 151, 152
 — Golf Club, 103
 —, Honor of, 106
 — industry, 135-136
 — Moor, 116, 118
 — Priory, 98, 119, 125-128, 133, 173, 177, 183, 205
 —, St George's Quay, 128-129
 — shipping, 128-131
 — slave trade, 130-131
 — Town Hall, 134
 Lancaster to Kendal Canal, 101-102, 134, 180-181
Lanercost Chronicle, 142
 Lardner family, 47
 Law, Brierley, 157
 Lawson, Robert, 178-179
 Leadbetter, Mark, 149
 Lee, Morgiana, 73, 174
 Leeds, 175
 Leicester Abbey, 96, 99
 —, Abbot of, 94

INDEX

- Leigh, Dr, 161
 Leighton Hall, 187, 188
 — Moss, 159-160, 189
 Leven, River, 137, 141, 143, 147, 149,
 193, 194, 200-201, 202
 Leven Sands guides, 143-151
 Levens Bridge, 145, 151
 Lindal-in-Furness, 203
 Lindale, 192-193
 Lindisfarne Priory, 3, 194
 Liverpool, 101, 109, 112, 130, 131,
 135, 180, 181
 Liverpool Bay, 21, 94
 Locke, Mr, 77
 Loftus, Tom, 75
 London, 55, 175, 184
 Longwood, 57
 Lonsdale, Hundred of, 164
 Lovell, Prior Giles, 126
 Lucas, John, 83, 184
 Lune Mills, 129, 134, 136
 —, River, 33, 81, 82, 83, 93, 96, 98,
 100-101, 105, 108, 110, 123, 124,
 128-131, 137, 144, 155, 157, 163,
 165, 175, 176, 177, 178, 205
 Lytham, 2, 40, 41-48, 49, 153

 Macauley, Lord, 124
 Machell, Major J. Ulf, 197
 McMahon, J., 157
 McMillan, Lord, 19
 Macpherson, Rev. H. A., 159
 Malkin Tower, 117
 Manchester, 51, 91, 107, 108, 109,
 113, 135, 175, 179-180
 Mareschal, William de, 194
 Marsh, George, 116-117
 Marsh Farm, 37-39
 Marshside, 29, 31
 Martin Mere, 29-30, 34
 Marton Mere, 34
 — Moss, 52-55
 Mary, Queen, 116

Materials for the History of Lancaster,
 114-115
 Matthews, Stanley, 65
 Meathop Moss, 160
 Meols, 1
 Merlin, 30
 Mersey, River, 25, 91, 176
 Middleton (near Lancaster), 177
 Middleton (Manchester), 35
 Middleton family, 187-188
 Miller, Philip, 28
 Mining, 202
 Mitchell, F. S., 158-159, 161
 Mitton Church, 99
 Monteagle, Lord, 2
 Morecambe, 1, 8-9, 102, 123, 131,
 137-140, 152, 153, 156, 157, 163-
 171, 179, 181, 208
 — fishermen, 152, 153, 170-171
 — illuminations, 168-169
 Morecambe Bay, 8, 77, 83, 96, 119,
 137-211
 — — inshore fishermen, 152-155,
 170-171
 — — oversands route, 143-151
 — — swimming championship, 156-
 158
 — — wildfowl, 158-162
 Moricambe, 75, 141
 Morley, 168
 Mossland Reclamation, 30-31, 86-88

 National Trust, 29, 195
 Natterjack toad, 24
 Nettle beer, 175
 Newby Bridge, 203
 Newton Mine, 203
 Nicholson, Norman, 204
 Norbreck, 75, 76, 78
 North Lonsdale foxhounds, 197
 North Meoles, 1, 2-3

 O'Dwyer, S., 141

INDEX

- Oakes, Clifford, 209-210
 Oldham, 57, 168
 Ovangle Salt Ayre, 179
 Overton, 163, 177-178, 179
- Pachillick, 190
 Palmer, W. T., 42
 Pape, T., 144, 148-149, 174
 Paris Exhibition, 61
 Pearson, R. O'Neill, 195
 Peat cutting, 83-86
 Pele, Roger, 206, 207
 Pennant, Thos., 132
 Pendle Hill, 91
 — witches, 117-118
 Penny, William, 133
 Pennystone Rock, 76
 Pickering, Miss L., 158
Picturesque Lancashire, 166-167, 176
 Piel Island, 161-162, 165, 180, 207-208
 Pilgrimage of Grace, 116
 Pilling, 83, 84, 89-95
 Plantagenet, Henry, 106
 Plants—
 American Rush, 22
 Geranium, 210
 Grass of Parnasus, 22
 Orchids, 22
 Stargrass, 21, 44
 Wintergreen, 21
 Poictou, Roger de, 105-106, 123, 163, 183
 Porter, John, 39, 42-43, 48, 69, 76
 Portus Scantii, 75-76
 Potter, James, 95
 Poulton-le-Fylde, 74
 Poulton-le-Sands, 102, 131, 138, 152, 163-165, 170, 171
 Preston, 3, 13, 29, 32, 33, 36, 47, 59, 77, 102, 108, 109, 111, 113, 114, 131
 — family, 194
 Priest's Keer, 144
- Ptolemy, 75, 141
 Pye, Roger, 73
- Quaker movement, 119-121, 186-188, 202
Quakers in Science and Industry, 129
- Raistrick, Dr Arthur, 129
 Rampside, 207
 Ratham, Capt, 43
 Rawcliffe Hall, 90
 Rawlinson, Robert, 119
 Red Bank, 144
 Redman, Bishop, 97
 Reginald of Durham, 42
 Rennie, John, 134
 Ribble, River, 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 13, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36-39, 40, 42, 49-50, 75, 77, 79, 84, 131, 159, 160
 Richard I, 106, 122
 Richard II, 106
 Richmond, Dr Ian, 105
 Richmond, Rev. Leigh, 91
 Rigby, Leonard, 24
 Riley, William, 189
 Rimmer family, 30
 Robinson, H. W., 189
 Rochdale, 57, 169
 Rockall, 79
 Roe Island, 207
 Roper, W. O., 110-111, 112, 113, 114-115
 Rossall, 7, 76, 77
 — Hall, 78
 Royal Agricultural Society of England, 66
 Royal Observer Corps, 115
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 23
 Rufford Old Hall, 29
 Rushen Abbey, 207
- Saffron Waldron, 173

INDEX

- St Annes-on-the-Sea, 41, 48-51
 St Columba, 49
 St Cuthbert, 2, 43, 194
 St Leger, 44
 St Martin's Abbey, Seez, 125
 St Michaels-on-the-Wyre, 74
 St Patrick, 172-173
 St Patrick's Chapel, 172-173, 177
 St Patrick's Skeer, 172
Sands of Morecambe Bay, The, 144
 Saunders, Howard, 158-159
 Savigney Abbey, 204
 Sawley Abbey, 83, 116
 Scarborough Castle, 120
 Scarisbrick, 31
 Schofield, M. M., 134-135
 Scott, Peter, 160
 Seton, Col Sir John, 107
 Shap, 138, 145
 Sharpe, Edmund, 159
 Sheep, 34, 37-39, 210-211
 Shiel, Loch, 112
 Silverdale, 155, 160, 184, 189-190
 Simnel, Lambert, 208
 Simpson, Miss Marjorie, 158
 Singleton, 74, 76
 — Thorpe, 76
 Skerton, 134, 137
 —, Roger of, 122
 Slater, Ralph, 93
 Slave trading, 130-131
 Sleigh, Rev. Wm., 189
 Slemish, 172
 Sobee, F. J., 90, 93, 95
 Solway Moss, 91, 161
 Southernes, Elizabeth, 118
 Southport, 1-19, 28, 29, 49, 76, 78, 139, 140.
 — Flower Show, 16-19
 — Lord Street, 6, 9-11, 13, 16
 — Marine Lake, 14-15
 — Pier, 13-14
 — Pleasure Park, 15-16
 — Visitor, 22
 Speed, John, 29, 30, 34, 49
 Speight, Ellen, 152
Stalls and Tabernacle Work, 126
 Stanley, Rev. Thos., 2-3
 Starkie, Rev. James, 3
 —, family of Cleworth, 117
 Stearne, Professor, 157
 Stephen, King, 125, 204
 Stiffkey, ex-Rector of, 62
 Stoke, Battle of, 207
 Stork Hotel, 103
 Storeys of Lancaster, 136
 Stout, William, 92, 112, 119, 129, 144, 148, 178
Striding Dales, The, 114
 Stuart, Charles Edward, 112-115
 Succat, 172
 Suffield, Lord, 35
 Sulgrave, 185
 Sunderland Point, 157, 178-179
 Sutcliffe, Halliwell, 114
 Sutton, Graham, 193
 —, William, 5-6, 9, 67
 Swarthmoor Hall, 119, 146, 147, 148, 202
 Syon, Convent of, 125-126
 Taylor, Henry, 157
 Thornber, Rev. William, 76
 Thurnham, 98
 Tomlinson, Richard, 37-39
 Torrisholme, 163
 Tostig, Earl, 163, 186
 Turf cutting, 88-89
 Tyldesley family, 67
 Ulverston, 119, 143, 149, 201-202, 203, 207
 — Church, 147
 Vale of Deadly Nightshade, 204, 206
Vertebrate Fauna of the Lake District, 159
 Vesey-Fitzgerald, Brian, 24

INDEX

- Vickerstown, 208-209
 Vivian, 30
- Wakes, Lancashire, 56-60
 Walney Island, 83, 161, 207, 208-211
Wanderings in Ribblesdale, 42
 Waring and Gillow Ltd, 132-133
 Warton, 150, 185-186
 — Crag, 159, 185-186, 188
 Washington, 185
 — family, 164, 165, 185
 Weeton, 75
 Welwyn Nursery, 52-54
 Wensley, Miss M., 158
 Wessington, 185
 —, Prior, 2
 West, Judge, 147
 —, Thomas, 134
 Whalley Abbey, 35, 98, 116
 Wheldon, J. A., 22
 Whitaker, Dr, 97-98, 201
 White, William, 203
 Whitefield, 35
 Whiteside, Edward, 67, 68, 72
 —, Jack, 84
- Whittle, Alice, 118
 Wigan, 3, 29, 40, 102
 Wild cattle, 34-35
 Wilkinson, John, 192-193
 Williamsons of Lancaster, 135-136
 Willoughby, 161
 Winckley, Thomas, 188
 Windermere, 195, 202
Windmill Land, 95
 Windmills, 74, 93-94
 Winmarleigh, 86-88
 Winster, River, 191, 192, 193, 195
 Winwick, 3
 Witches, 117-118
 Wolves, 193
 Women's Institutes, 180
 Woodhouse family, 177
 Wordsworth, William, 144, 201
 Workers' Educational Association, 82
 Wyre, River, 33, 47, 75, 77, 78,
 79-80, 81-82, 93, 107
- Yealand Conyers, 184, 186-188
 — Redmayne, 184, 188
 York Minster, 25-26

